

THE ACKERMANN AUS BÜHMEN AND THE BOOK OF JOB

by

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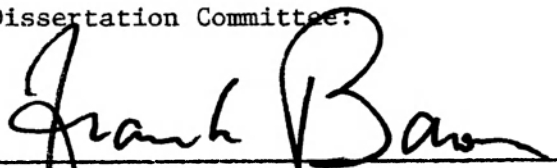
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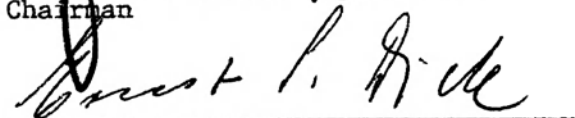
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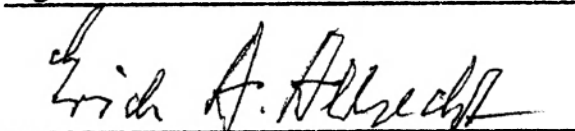
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The book of Job, which Tennyson called "the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature,"¹ poses questions about the most basic and urgent concerns of men at all times: the problem of death, the meaning of suffering, the question of God's nature, the justice of His world order, and the value of man's life. As the classic treatment of many of these problems it has clearly influenced numerous literary works directly; to others it shows affinity on account of closely related subject matter or structural characteristics. There is hardly a period of German literary history in which the question of Job's image does not play a significant role; be it in a work by Hartmann von Aue, Grimmelshausen, Goethe, Heine, Kafka or Frisch.

Although many works have been compared to the book of Job, few bear a more striking resemblance to it in subject matter and structure than does Johann von Tepl's Ackermann aus Böhmen, a late medieval debate between a plowman and the figure of Death over the question of the justice and justification of death in God's world order. Apart from a few isolated suggestions of similarities between Job and the Ackermann, no examination of the relationship between them has been undertaken.²

Both works take the form of a debate. Each is framed not as a philosophical argument over an academic point, but as a personal experience of suffering and grief with which the protagonist attempts to come to terms. Both portray the archetypal experience of a sudden, precipitous fall from a secure and happy life into a state of acute

misery. The ordeal produces a new awareness of the problem of suffering in the world at large and a questioning of the reasons and justification for its existence.

Both debates make use of legal terminology and a quasi-legal setting in which traditional attitudes are on trial as the protagonists struggle to reconcile their own experiences of suffering with traditional concepts of God's justice. Underlying both works is the age-old problem of theodicy, the question how to reconcile the existence of evil with a God who is at once all-powerful and all-good.

Job and the Plowman ponder the puzzling relationship between virtue and reward. The Plowman rages at the injustice of Death in taking away his wife, who, Death himself admits, was a woman of model virtue. Job is dismayed at the contradiction in the fact that a just God can allow a "blameless and upright" man to suffer. Both examine the question of man's relationship to God and his place in the creation as opposing views vie with each other. The Plowman and Job defend the worth of man against cynical opponents. At the same time they struggle with the contradiction between God's loving care in fashioning man and the processes of sickness and death which seem to belie it.

In both contests God appears at the end as referee and judge to resolve the disputes. But in spite of His arbitration, no actual explanations are given. Both debates conclude with a moving hymn of praise to God's power and wisdom. In each case the encounter with God has a profound effect on the questioner, who capitulates, ceases his questioning, and affirms the order of the universe as it is.

Such a comparison raises many questions. What is the meaning of the startling similarity between Tepl's work and Job? What significance

did it have for Tepl? Did he begin with the book of Job and then deviate from it to hide the similarity of his borrowings? How familiar was the story of Job during Tepl's time? How was the figure of Job depicted and his conflict perceived? To what extent were the readers of the fifteenth century aware of the similarity? How were the problems of death and suffering dealt with in other medieval works? The answers to these questions and the comparison of the works provides new insights into the place of Tepl's work in the wider context of literary history.

Ernst Schwarz, in his summary of recent research on the Ackermann concludes that the many difficulties in the interpretation of the work result from the fact that we know so little about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He states:

Immer noch steckt das Werk, das längst in die Forschung der internationalen Literaturwissenschaft eingegangen ist, voller Probleme, über die sich der Dichter wohl selbst am meisten wundern würde, da sie darin begründet sind, dass wir zu wenig von dieser Zeit des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts wissen.³

By taking the book of Job as a traditional standard of reference in dealing with the problems of the justice of the world order, suffering and death, and the Job theme as a recurrent motif in world literature, it is the plan of this study to examine the attitudes which are unique to Tepl's handling of the issues which the works treat in common and thus to provide a new criterion by which to judge the place of Tepl's work in the history of ideas.

The study shows that the attitude of Tepl's Plowman differs from previous attitudes toward suffering. Unlike the traditional ideal of the pious, patient, sufferer, which Job epitomized throughout the Middle Ages, Tepl allows his protagonist to question the reasonableness and justice of his virtuous wife's death as well as the justification for

the very existence of death. Tepl's handling of the problem goes beyond previous treatments in the questions it tolerates and represents a real confrontation with the problem of the justice of the world order and the assumptions of his time. The comparison casts light on Tepl's concept of God and the way the late medieval mind dealt with the problem of evil. It indicates that Tepl was aware of certain contradictions in the traditional concept of the nature of death and the relationship between death and God.

Although it may appear that the Plowman's suit against Death concerns a matter quite different from Job's complaint against suffering, the two are actually very similar. The Plowman's complaint, like Job's, focuses on his suffering resulting from his loss. In the book of Job itself the problem of death is a major theme, although it does not receive the same attention as the theme of suffering. Both problems are aspects of the larger issue of theodicy--the relationship between God and evil.

The comparison and contrast undertaken here has relevance to the controversial problems of Ackermann interpretation. As is the case with the book of Job, the interpretive positions on the Ackermann have been many, varied, and often contradictory. The history of this criticism has been treated often and will be only briefly summarized here. After twice being rediscovered--by Gottsched in the eighteenth century and by Hanka in the early nineteenth century--and subsequently all but forgotten, interest in Tepl's Ackermann was again revived by the publication of Kniescheck's critical edition in 1877 and was greatly increased by the 1917 Bernt-Burdach edition and Burdach's extensive commentaries. Burdach, Bernt, Rehm, and others heralded the work as a landmark of early

Renaissance humanism, interpreting it as an affirmation of the freedom, beauty, rationality, and essential goodness of man. This interpretation was questioned by Ella Schafferus, who, in an article published in 1935, denied any humanist influence whatsoever in the work arguing that it reflected strictly medieval (particularly Thomist) doctrines and attitudes.⁵ Thus the Ackermann became the center of a controversy over whether it should be considered more characteristic of medieval or of early Renaissance thinking. More recently the terms medieval and Renaissance have themselves come under fire, so that the periods are no longer considered to be sharply divided.

Arthur Hübner took up a position between the two extremes. On the one hand he pointed to the close connections between Tepl's work and earlier German literary forms such as the Meistersang, the popular song, and the Marienlied. But he also acknowledged the form, "die neue Latinität," to be something new in German literary tradition. Hübner faulted both sides of the argument, however, for attempting to classify the work in terms of the history of ideas (geistesgeschichtlich) before the form had been properly analyzed, saying: "Es ist ein Unding, eine Dichtung. . . geistesgeschichtlich, also weltanschaulich, zu analysieren, ehe man sie nicht formgeschichtlich analysiert hat."⁶ Since Hübner's remarks, most studies have concentrated on analyzing the form and structure of the work, but the controversy over the proper placement of the Ackermann in the chronology of ideas has never been abandoned.

In 1943 Renée Brand published a radically new interpretation of the Ackermann in which she argued that the author's point of view is to be identified with that of Death.⁷ She asserts that Death wins the debate by convincing the Plowman of the necessity for and justness of his

function in the world order and of the foolishness of rebellion against it. Brand's view strongly influenced Walshe's 1954 structural interpretation of the work and was affirmed in Bäuml's 1960 study of the rhetorical devices and structure of the Ackermann.⁸ Other critics such as Hahn and Sichel reject Brand's thesis.⁹ Kuhn and Hahn regard the debate not only as undecided but as essentially unresolvable.¹⁰

The Job-Ackermann comparison provides us with an opportunity to evaluate the widely divergent views about the Ackermann. This study is partially consistent with Hübner's admonition in that it deals with problems of content and historical questions by arguing from the work's structure. But it also considers the history of the Job theme to be a useful and valid point of reference for the study of Tepl's treatment of the issues.

The history of the Job image is well documented. This study begins with a review of the development of the theme from Old Testament to medieval times and an examination of the relationship between the medieval Job figure and Tepl's plowman. It establishes a convincing set of arguments for the position held by Hahn, but goes further in its examination of the Plowman's speeches from the point of view of the strategy of the Plowman's arguments. The analysis shows that, similar to the pattern in the Job debate, the Plowman by no means concedes to his opponent in the conflict, but strongly maintains his opposition to the end. The arguments by which the author characterizes Death reveal that it was Tepl's intention that the contest should end in a draw. Death's role is not that of a consoler. It is God, not Death, who convinces the Plowman. The softening of the Plowman's attack and his apparent conciliatory overtures are merely strategic feints and are

characteristic of the varied approaches of the Plowman's mosaic style of argument. These alternations are part of the dramatic give-and-take of the debate and reflect the overall principle of contrasts and juxtapositions which the author employs as a stylistic device. As in the book of Job the speeches often do not directly answer or try to refute the charges of the opposing side, but are judged individually by their overall impressiveness and rhetorical cleverness.

An awareness of the analagous structure of Job and a comparison of the treatment of the issues points up the large number of inconsistencies in the Plowman's arguments and shows that Tepl purposely characterized the Plowman as holding a naive and contradictory view of God's nature, which he intended to replace at the end with a more complex and complete view. As in the book of Job, the response to God's verdict constitutes the culmination of the work. It is in the final prayer that the author attempts to come to terms with the questions raised in the debate.

The comparison with Job allows us to view the controversy over medieval and Renaissance elements in the work from a new perspective. Though widely separated in time, the works arise from, and call into question, similar sets of traditionally accepted beliefs. If the depiction of Job's revolt in the Old Testament represents a daring act, the implications of which are inexhaustible and revolutionary in nature, then our finding that the Plowman's revolt against Death bears profound similarities to Job justifies the proposition that the Ackermann is, in a sense, a similar kind of revolt or, at least, an interpretation of the revolt in the original Job story. Written at a time when the image of the patient Job predominated, the Ackermann

appears to move against the long established Christian tradition, transcending its time and to show genuinely modern tendencies.

Footnotes

¹ Quoted in Samuel Terrien, Job: Poet of Existence (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 14.

² The similarity has been noted in passing by Günther Müller, Deutsche Dichtung von der Renaissance bis zum Ausgang des Barock (Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1930), p. 55; Konrad Burdach, Der Dichter des Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit, 1. Hälfte, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, III, 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926), p. 459; E. A. Philippson, "Der Ackermann aus Böhmen: A Summary of Recent Research and an Appreciation," Modern Language Quarterly, 2 (1941), 263; Wolfgang Stammer, Von der Mystik zum Barock, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1950), p. 30; and Jacques Choron, Death and Western Thought (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 290.

³ Ernst Schwarz, "Einleitung," Der Ackermann aus Böhmen des Johannes von Tepl und seine Zeit, Hrsg. Ernst Schwarz, Wege der Forschung, 143 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 29.

⁴ For discussions of the history of Ackermann criticism see Isaac Bacon, "A Survey of the Changes in the Interpretation of the 'Ackermann aus Böhmen'," Studies in Philology, 53 (1956), 101-113; Walter Blank, "Aspekte der 'Ackermann'-Interpretation," Der Deutschunterricht, 17, No. 2 (1965), 63-79; and Schwarz, pp. 1-30.

⁵ Ella Schafferus, "Der Ackermann aus Böhmen und die Weltanschauung

des Mittelalters," Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum, 72 (1935), 209-239.

⁶ Arthur Hübner, "Deutsches Mittelalter und italienische Renaissance," Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde, 51 (1937), 225-39; rpt. s.v. Schwarz, p. 379.

⁷ Renée Brand, Zur Interpretation des "Ackermann aus Böhmen", Baseler Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1944).

⁸ M. O'C. Walshe, "Der Ackermann aus Böhmen: A Structural Interpretation," Classica et Mediaevalia, 15 (1954), 130-45; Franz Bäumel, Rhetorical Devices and Structure in the "Ackermann aus Böhmen", University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 60 (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1960).

⁹ Gerhard Hahn, Die Einheit des "Ackermann aus Böhmen", Münchner Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 5 (München: Beck, 1963); Günther Jungbluth, rev. of Der Ackermann aus Böhmen--Storia della critica, by Giorgio Sichel, Arcadia, 9 (1974), 188-92.

¹⁰ Hugo Kuhn, "Zwei mittelalterliche Dichtungen vom Tod: 'Memento mori' und 'Der Ackermann von Böhmen'," Der Deutschunterricht, 5, No. 6 (1953), 93.

CHAPTER II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOB THEME

The Old Testament

The story of Job is one of the oldest legends in the history of literature. It seems to have existed long before the Old Testament book of Job was composed. In the apocrypha of the Septuagint Job is identified with Jobab the King of Edom, great-great-grandson of Abraham.¹ The name Job is found in texts ranging from the nineteenth to the fourteenth century B.C., and literary parallels to the work date back to the second millennium B.C..²

The date of composition of the Old Testament book of Job is placed by most Bible scholars somewhere between 800 and 500 B.C., although a few consider it to be as recent as the third century.³ Some scholars date the two major parts separately, placing the prose section--which comprises the prologue and epilogue--in the eighth or ninth century, and the verse section--the dialogue between Job and his friends--in the sixth century.⁴ The question which part of the book is older and represents the original conception of the work remains one of the main issues of controversy, along with the question of the authorship of the various parts.

The debate over the unity of the work is prompted by the fact that two different views of Job appear to be represented in the book. The Job of the prologue accepts his fate unquestioningly with the words, "[T]he Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of

the Lord" (1:21).⁵ He never questions the cause of his misfortunes or the rightness of God's action, saying: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10). But the Job of the verse dialogue is anything but the patient sufferer of the prologue. In despair he curses the day of his birth crying: "Let the day perish wherein I was born" (3:3), and criticizes God directly: "If I sin, what do I do to thee, thou watcher of Men? / Why hast thou made me thy mark?" (7:20). "As for me, is my complaint against man? / Why should I not be impatient?" (21:4). He challenges the justice of God's world order: "Does it seem good to thee to oppress, / to despise the work of thy hands / and favor the designs of the wicked?" (10:3). "Behold, I cry out 'Violence!' but I am not answered; / I call aloud, but there is no justice" (19:7). "Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty, / and why do those who know him never see his days?" (24:1). Far from patiently acceding to the punishment that has been meted out to him, he staunchly defends his integrity and his rights before God: "[N]evertheless I will maintain and argue my ways before Him--even to His face" (13:15, Amplified Bible).⁶

How is it that we are given two such disparate pictures of Job? Part of the answer seems to lie in the fact that the work was almost certainly written by more than one author and over a long period of time. Some critics argue that the dialogue poem is the oldest part of the work and represents the original conception of the problem. They speculate that the prose frame was added to the poem by a later hand, possibly to moderate the unorthodox questionings of the dialogue. Others claim that the prose narrative already existed in written form and was used as the basis for the poetic dialogue. A third group believes that

the prose section and the verse dialogue were written at the same time and were based on an ancient Edomite oral tradition.⁷

Although there is no real concensus among Bible scholars, it seems fairly certain that the prose narrative must have preceded or been composed at the same time as the dialogue, since, as Andersen explains, "It is essential for the book that the reader knows (as Job does not know) that his troubles come from God, but [sic] were not provoked by any fault on his part, but were, in fact, a consequence of his virtue and were intended to prove and enhance his righteousness" (p. 44). If the reader could not be certain of Job's integrity, the debate itself would be pointless. Terrien points out that, "It is not probable that the poet began his work in medias res with the sentence, 'And Job opened his mouth and cursed his day' (3:1)" (p. 887). Even if a general acquaintance with the legend on the part of the listeners could be assumed, some preparatory remarks to set the scene would certainly be expected.

In addition to the uncertainty as to the relationship of the two major parts of the book, there are other sections, such as the poem on wisdom (chapter 28) and the speeches of Elihu (chapters 32-37), which differ considerably in language and style from the main body of the work and are believed to have been composed independently and inserted. Just how all the parts were fitted together, when and by whom, remains unclear.

Study of the book of Job is complicated as well by the fact that, because it is one of the oldest works of world literature, the exact meaning of many passages remains obscure. Some words occur in no other sources, and scholars can only guess at their meaning. Other

passages have obviously been corrupted by mistakes in copying. Added to this are sections which many scholars believe to be out of order or to have been placed in the mouth of the wrong speaker. An example is the missing speech of Zophar in the third round of speeches, which may have been replaced by that of Elihu, a character who appears nowhere else in the work. Or perhaps Zophar's speech was incorporated into Job's last and longest discourse, which contains several statements manifestly inconsistent with the rest of his remarks.

Yet, on the whole, due to the greatest of care exercised by Hebrew scribes in transcribing, the book is remarkably well preserved for a work of its great age. In spite of the obscurity of certain sections, the broad outlines and intention of the work are clear. Problematical passages must be considered in the context of the clear direction of the whole.

Jewish Interpretations

The difficulties presented by the text and the two conflicting pictures of Job in the work have complicated interpretation of the book from the beginning. With few exceptions most early interpreters chose to portray Job as the pious, patient sufferer of the prologue and epilogue, emphasizing his steadfastness and ultimate reward. They either ignored or tried to interpret away Job's rebellious questioning of God's justice in the dialogue.

Other references to Job in the Old Testament scriptures characterize him as a saintly example. The book of Ezekiel cites Job, alongside the patriarchs Noah and Daniel, as a model of righteousness, saying: "even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it [the land],

they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14:14). The apocryphal book of Tobias speaks of him as an example of patience, saying: "Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him [Tobias], that an example might be given to posterity of his patience, as also of holy Job"(2:12).⁸

It is difficult to say to what degree early references to him were influenced by sources other than the Old Testament book such as the Targum of Job, which was in circulation before the first century B.C.; but was probably composed two or three centuries earlier; the Testament of Job, which dates from the first century B.C., and the writings of Jesus Ben Sira of the second century before Christ.⁹ All of these, as well as numerous references to him in other early Semitic works, adhere to the popular legend, depicting him as a pious patriarch and hero. How strong the influence of this legend was, is illustrated in the writings of Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia (392-428). Bishop Theodore accepted the popular story as true, but rejected the Old Testament book of Job on the grounds that the speeches attributed to him in the book were unfitting to a man of his character.¹⁰

Nahum Glatzer states that both Jewish and Christian expositors "avoided a direct confrontation with the text of the book, in order not to be exposed (or to expose the pious reader) to the bluntness of the hero's speeches and the shattering self-revelation of God in His answer" (p. 11).

In the talmudic-midrashic commentaries on the scriptures, however, a few writers did acknowledge that Job acted rebelliously and was reprimanded by God for his lack of patience. Some tried to excuse his behavior by arguing that he acted under extraordinary duress. Datz

cites at least one example from the Talmud which states that Job blasphemed God by his complaint and that he deserved his punishment because of it (p. 26). On the whole, however, as Glatzer states in his summary of classical Judaic interpretations, "The talmudic-midrashic literature (primarily of the first centuries) treats Job as the most pious Gentile that ever lived" and "avoided reference to the extremes of Job's rebellion against evil and injustice and their Author" (pp. 17-18).

It is therefore not surprising that the Jewish scholars in the third century before Christ who translated the scriptures into the Greek of the Septuagint chose to emphasize Job's moral character. It was also these scholars who, influenced by the widespread acceptance of belief in immortality, which began in the second century before Christ, introduced the most important change in the interpretation of the work--the doctrine of reward in the hereafter.¹¹ This doctrine made Job's dilemma less problematic and had a profound influence on subsequent interpretations of the work. It was now possible for suffering to be seen as a discipline to be faithfully endured in the hope of a future reward.

Job in the New Testament and Interpretations of the Church Fathers

The only New Testament reference to Job, that in the book of James, pictures him as the already stereotyped model of patience. James writes: "As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. . . . You have heard of the steadfastness of Job" (5:10-11).

Likewise, the early church fathers such as Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-255), who wrote the first complete Christian commentary (now lost) on the book of Job, asserted that the purpose of Job's suffering was to demonstrate his virtue.¹² John Chrysostom (ca. 344/5-407), who was considered the greatest preacher of the Eastern Church, although unable to read Hebrew and relying on translations which minimized Job's rebellion, was one of the few to acknowledge such impious gestures as Job's tearing of his clothing and cursing the day of his birth. But he explained that these were proofs that Job was really human and had not been "anaesthetized" by God.¹³

The commentary of Ambrose (ca. 339-397) which treats both Job and David as representing two types of Christ figures--sufferer and king--¹⁴ is characteristic of the increasing tendency to view Job as a pre-figuration and symbol of Christ. The most important step in this direction was taken by Jerome (ca. 347-419/20) whose translation of the scriptures, the Latin Vulgate, interpreted Job's statements to signify belief in the resurrection. It was on the basis of this translation that the book of Job came to be used as proof of the resurrection and support for the doctrine of eternal life.¹⁵

The Medieval View of Job

The most exhaustive and influential commentary was the Moralia in Job of Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604), which became and remained the primary authority on Job throughout the Middle Ages. Datz calls it the most read, or at least most often copied, work of the Middle Ages and the moral handbook of the Church until well into the twelfth century (pp. 66-68). The thirty-five books of Gregory's commentary on Job give a threefold explication of the text, explaining the historical, the

allegorical, and the moral meaning of each passage. As in other interpretations, Job is seen from the New Testament perspective as a type of Christ and prototypical patient sufferer. According to Gregory, Job could not have sinned either before or during his trial because God would have been proved wrong and would have lost the wager.¹⁶

Subsequent commentaries, such as the Glossa Ordinaria of the twelfth century and the Compendium in Job of Peter of Blois (1135-1204), largely echoed Gregory's interpretation.¹⁷ Neither Albertus Magnus nor Thomas Aquinas, both of whom wrote Job commentaries, deviated from the prevailing view.¹⁸

Thus throughout the middle Ages Job was thought of strictly as the passive figure of the prologue. The impatient, questioning Job of the dialogue was ignored almost completely. Job's complaint, especially his cursing of the day of his birth, was never taken literally, but was always interpreted to be cursing of something else which might be more acceptable. Gregory the Great, for example, states that Job was actually cursing evil, and Odo of Cluny, that he cursed the transience of life.¹⁹ In Hartmann von Aue's Armer Heinrich it is Heinrich rather than Job who curses his day. Heinrich is contrasted with Job, who is the prime example of forbearance:

dô schiet in sîn bitter leit
 von Jôbes gedulkikeit.
 wan ez leit Jôb der guote
 mit geduldigem muote,
 dôz im ze lîdenne geschach,
 durch der sêle gemach
 den siechtuom und die swacheit
 die er von der werlte leit:
 des lobetê er got und vreute sich.
 dô tete der arme Heinrich
 leider niender alsô:
 er was trûric and unvrô. . . .

vervluochet und verwâzen
 wart vil dicke der tac
 dâ sîn geburt ane lac.
 (vv. 137-162)²⁰

In addition to commentaries on the Old Testament book, Job was frequently mentioned in literature, as in Hartmann's Armer Heinrich: Hügelsberger, in his dissertation "Der Dulder Hiob in der deutschen Literatur" (1930), traces the Job theme back as far as the Old High German Wurmsegen.²¹ Although the Wurmsegen does not itself mention the name of Job, later manuscripts regularly introduce it with references to Job, who, it was held, had been plagued by worms. A standard introduction was: "Job lac in miste / er rief ûf ze Criste . . ." ²² Other works consistently praise his righteousness and unfailing patience. Rudolf von Ems's Weltchronik refers to "den gûtin Jobin" and his "veste gedultheit, / die er mit wancke nie verlie, / swie groz erbeit in ane gie" (vv. 3932-34).²³ Das Väterbuch likewise speaks of Job, "Der in Gedult sich hette ergeben" (v. 37053).²⁴ In Konrad von Helmsdorf's Spiegel des menschlichen Heils he is "Sant Jop, der gedultig man" (v. 1631).²⁵ The fourteenth century poetic paraphrase of the book of Job, in the literature of the Deutscher Ritterorden, includes in the introduction to the book the usual comment on Job: "So gar geduldeclich er leit / Daz er kegen Gote, daz geschach, / Ny ein torlich wort gesprach" (vv. 254-256).²⁶

In the iconography of the Middle Ages as well, Job was depicted as a type of prototypical sufferer. He often appeared in the familiar medieval formula described by Pickering: "a male figure with bowed head, seated on a rock or mound."²⁷ Although this figure usually represented a thinker or philosopher pondering or sorrowing, it was easily adapted to Job's situation, since the rock could be a

refuse or ash heap. Pickering includes a reproduction of a painting of Job in this pose, describing it as the medieval "posture of humility and obedience, of the man sorely tried" (p. 113, plate 12).

Although the medieval picture of Job conformed to a rigid stereotype, there were developments within the basic concept. Beginning in the twelfth century with Bernhard of Clairvaux, and in the writings of the mystics, emphasis shifted from Job's passive submission to praise of his perseverance and endurance.²⁸ The passive sufferer became a heroic one. Determined endurance of misfortune became a discipline to be rewarded in the afterlife and suffering a test that could be a process of purification, a preparation for life in the hereafter. Heinrich Seuse describes man's life as a kind of knighthood: "'der lidend Job sprach: militia est etc., des menschen leben uf disem ertrich ist nit anders denn ein ritterschaft.'"²⁹ In at least two texts, the Väterbuch and a sermon of Johannes Tauler, Job actually requests his ordeal of suffering.³⁰ Job's torment was seen as a challenge and a process of purification.

The second development was an increase in emphasis on Job as a symbol of hope, the hope of the resurrection. In the fourteenth century this aspect assumed greater importance, overshadowing the sufferer figure.³¹ The Old Testament patriarch who prefigured Christ's suffering and pointed ahead to the resurrection in the famous words: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, / and at last he will stand upon the earth" (19:25) became the preeminent witness to the resurrection.

Job after 1400

Thus as we have seen, no sign of questioning or rebellion on

Job's part was acknowledged in medieval writings about him. He remained throughout the prime example of the pious sufferer. It was an attitude which held into the eighteenth century. Even Luther's translation of the Bible did little to alter the prevailing outlook. Luther himself, though admitting in his preface to the book that Job "talks in his human weakness too much against God, and thus sins amid his sufferings," still believed, as he states in one of the Tischreden, that "The author wished to paint a picture of patience."³²

Not until the eighteenth century did Bible expositors such as Robert Lowth (1710-87) acknowledge "the impatience of Job" and his irreverence toward the justice of God. Lowth, however, still interpreted the true object of the poem to be: "to demonstrate the necessity of humility."³³ In the nineteenth century commentators such as Lamartine (1790-1869) saw Job's rebellion clearly. For him Job was a Promethean figure, "the victim become judge."³⁴

Modern interpreters of the book deal almost exclusively with the Job of the dialogue--the dissenter, the rebel, the one who questions the justice of God and the meaning of life if there is no justice. They see in Job's questioning the existentialist dilemma. Modern commentators call him "the baffled sufferer," the "problematic rebel," the "faithful rebel."³⁵

In his work Hiob--der Existentialist (1952), Hans Ehrenberg writes: "Unsere Zeit ist Hiob-reif geworden."³⁶ That the twentieth century has experienced a resurgence of interest in the Job theme can be shown by a cursory survey of works written on the theme. One can find at least seventeen modern English plays about Job, including works by such authors as H. G. Wells (The Undying Fire, 1919), Archibald MacLeish

(J. B.: A Play in Verse, 1956) and Robert Frost (The Masque of Reason, 1945). There are at least fourteen German titles, the better known of which include Kokoschka's 1918 play Hiob, a novel by Joseph Roth, Hiob (1930), and ^{the} five dialogues by Ehrenberg titled Hiob--der Existentialist (1952).³⁷

The modern proliferation of works on the Job theme is contrasted by Jon Levenson with the nineteenth century's lack of "a single significant work in English re-creating the story of Job."³⁸ Germany produced some five examples which have survived.³⁹ Two of these, however, deal only remotely with the Job theme. Levenson sees this lack of popularity as due to the fact that the story of Job was incompatible with the optimism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and with the belief in man's ability to solve his problems through social reform, science and technology (pp. 1-2). The catastrophes of the twentieth century destroyed this optimistic confidence and produced a more favorable climate for works which portrayed man in Job's dilemma. Modern Job dramas have dealt with Job's criticism of the adequacy of traditional beliefs to explain what has happened to him. They question not only man's ability to solve his problems, but also the capacity of reason to find a meaning in man's tribulations and to provide consolation for trials. They deal with the nature and justice of God, belief in God, the question of cosmic meaninglessness. Since the twenties, according to Elisabeth Frenzel, Job has represented in literature "das Glaubensproblem des aus der Sicherheit der Existenz gestossenen Menschen."⁴⁰

The Ackermann

The modern image of Job the rebel and questioner contrasts radically with the medieval picture of Job the pious sufferer. Thus, when Günther Müller says of Tepl's Plowman: "Wie ein Hiob begehrt der Ackermann auf gegen sein Geschick,"⁴¹ he is speaking in modern terms and certainly not of the view of Job current in Tepl's time. If Tepl did think of his Plowman as a Job figure, he certainly had a more enlightened view than his contemporaries. If so, probably from his own reading of the book. Glutsch provides at least one hint that a few religious sects may not have followed the prevailing interpretation, but one closer to the actual biblical text (p. 24).

The extensive similarities raise the question whether the book of Job was Tepl's point of departure. Many sections resemble passages in the Old Testament book: the catalog of God's virtues, the description of his governing of the forces of nature, rain, snow, hail, winds; the words spoken by Death enumerating man's remarkable accomplishments. But in spite of these similarities there is not enough evidence to establish direct borrowing; nor does Tepl specifically mention Job as Hartmann does.

Lacking any such direct references to Job, we must assume that the revolt of Tepl's plowman is an independent confrontation with the assumptions of his time. While Hartmann's Armer Heinrich deals with the Jobean situation in the medieval categories of tugend, triuwe, ere, etc., Tepl's plowman resembles the modern view of Job as a real questioning of the concept of the justice of the world order. This study will examine how the two works deal with the themes which they treat in common and how Tepl's conception of the issues is reflected in the structure of his work.

Footnotes

¹ Marvin H. Pope, introd., Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes, XV (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), xxx.

² Pope, p. xxxii.

³ Samuel Terrien, "Introduction and Exegesis of the Book of Job," in The Interpreter's Bible, III (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 888-90; Francis I. Andersen, Job: An Introduction and Commentary (London: Inter-Varsity, 1976), pp. 63-64; Pope, p. xxxvii.

⁴ Terrien, pp. 888-90.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the Old and New Testaments are from the Revised Standard Version.

⁶ The Amplified Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965).

⁷ For a summary of articles on the various positions see Terrien, Interpreter's Bible, pp. 884-85.

⁸ The Holy Bible: Douay Version (New York: Kenedy, 1961).

⁹ Günther Datz, Die Gestalt Hiobs in der kirchlichen Exegese und der Arme Heinrich Hartmanns von Aue, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, No. 108 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1973), p. 24; Ulf Wielandt, "Hiob in der alt- und mittelhochdeutschen Literatur," Diss. Freiburg 1970, p. 32; Nahum N. Glatzer, The Dimensions of Job: A Study and Selected Readings (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 13-15; Pope, p. xxxvi.

¹⁰ Glatzer, p. 15.

¹¹ Jean Daniélou, "Job: The Mystery of Man and of God," from Holy Pagans of the Old Testament, trans. Felix Faber (New York: Longmans, 1957), rpt. in The Dimensions of Job, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 107; Datz, p. 28.

¹² Datz, pp. 40-41.

¹³ J. P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca, LXIV, 533A, quoted in Datz, p. 44; Glatzer, pp. 24-26.

¹⁴ Karl Heinz Glutsch, "Die Gestalt Hiobs in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters," Diss. Karlsruhe 1972, p. 26.

¹⁵ Glatzer, p. 27; Wielandt, p. 73.

¹⁶ Datz, pp. 69, 73.

¹⁷ Glutsch, p. 32; Datz, pp. 79, 89.

¹⁸ Glutsch, p. 33; Datz, pp. 91-92.

¹⁹ Glutsch, pp. 88, 96.

²⁰ Hartmann von Aue, Der arme Heinrich, Hrsg. Hermann Paul, 13. Aufl., Ludwig Wolff, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, Nr. 3 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966).

²¹ Joseph Hügelsberger, "Der Dulder Hiob in der deutschen Literatur," Diss. Graz 1930.

- ²² Hügelsberger, p. 21.
- ²³ Rudolf von Ems, Weltchronik, Hrsg. Gustav Ehrismann, 2. Aufl., Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 20 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1967).
- ²⁴ Das Väterbuch, Hrsg. Karl Reissenberger, Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 22 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1914).
- ²⁵ Konrad von Helmsdorf, Der Spiegel des menschlichen Heils, Hrsg. Axel Lindquist, Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 31 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1924).
- ²⁶ Die mitteldeutsche poetische Paraphrase des Buches Hiob, Hrsg. T. E. Karsten, Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 21 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1910).
- ²⁷ Frederick Pickering, Literature and Art in the Middle Ages (Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1970), p. 93.
- ²⁸ Glutsch, pp. 22-24, 68, 176.
- ²⁹ Heinrich Seuse, Deutsche Schriften, Hrsg. K. Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1907), pp. 55, 19, quoted in Wielandt, p. 50.
- ³⁰ Wielandt, p. 95.
- ³¹ Glutsch, pp. 46, 84, 178.
- ³² Martin Luther, Works of Martin Luther, (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman and The Castle Press, 1932), VI, 383; Martin Luther, Luther's Works, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), LIV,

(Table Talk, Spring 1533, No. 475), p. 80.

³³ Robert Lowth, "Of the Poem of Job," from De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum, trans. George Gregory (London, 1847), Lecture XXXIII, rpt. in The Dimensions of Job, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 137.

³⁴ Glatzer, p. 43.

³⁵ Andersen, p. 155; Maurice Friedman, Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus, rev. ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 12-22; Martin Buber, "A God Who Hides His Face," from The Prophetic Faith, trans. Carlyle Witton-Davies (New York, 1949), rpt. in The Dimensions of Job, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 64.

³⁶ Hans Ehrenberg, Hiob--der Existentialist: Fünf Dialoge in zwei Teilen (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1952), p. 5.

³⁷ Elisabeth Frenzel, "Hiob," in Stoffe der Weltliteratur, 3. Aufl. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1970), pp. 319-20; Glutsch, Appendix.

³⁸ Jon Douglas Levenson, The Book of Job in its Time and in the Twentieth Century, LeBaron Russell Briggs Prize, Honors Essays in English, 1971 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 1.

³⁹ See Hügelsberger, pp. 117-37; Glutsch, Appendix, pp. xxiii-xv.

⁴⁰ Frenzel, p. 320.

⁴¹ Müller, p. 55.

CHAPTER III. JOB AND THE ACKERMANN

Death in the Book of Job and in the Medieval View

Although Job's own struggle centers on the justification of suffering in this life, he is also concerned with the problem of death, a theme which is a primary motif in his speeches. For Job the problem is a critical one, since at the time of the book's composition there was no belief in immortality of the kind that later Hebrew and Christian thought envisioned. At this stage in Old Testament writings all souls were thought to go down to Sheol where they continued in a kind of shadowy half-existence. It is clear from Job's words that this was not a place to look forward to. He calls it "the land of gloom and deep darkness. / The land of gloom and chaos, where light is as darkness" (10: 21-22).

If any wrongs were to be righted, any judgments meted out, it had to happen in this life. Indeed, Job's dearest wish is for his integrity to be vindicated in this life. What good will it do if he be vindicated after his death? Job says of death: "so thou destroyest the hope of man. . . . His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; / they are brought low, and he perceives it not. / He feels only the pain of his own body" (14: 19-22). He answers his friends on the subject of the fate of the wicked: "You say, 'God stores up their iniquity for their sons.' / Let him recompense it to themselves that they may know it. / Let their own eyes see their destruction" (21: 19-20). It is essential that the relationship between sin and punishment,

virtue and reward, be made clear in this life.¹

With the acceptance of belief in immortality, the scene of retribution and reward could be shifted to the afterlife. This change eased Job's dilemma somewhat, but it still did not explain the reason for suffering and evil. In the strict monotheism of Old Testament thought, God was the only creator and therefore ultimately responsible for everything. There was no dualism between good and evil.² Even Satan was subject to God, as can be seen from the prologue in which he must ask God's permission to test Job. King explains that in the course of time "the ideal of Yahweh was gradually moralized so that it became increasingly difficult to assign evil directly to him."³

Christian thought was influenced by Greek ideas, especially Plato's definition of God as "the Idea of the Good," which made it heresy to say that God is the cause of evil.⁴ Augustine, who was himself indebted to Platonic thought, fought against the Manichean heresy that posited two gods, one good and one evil. He resolved the problem of evil by defining it as a lack or deprivation of good. Evil was not a substance with its own essence, but a defective good.⁵ Aquinas likewise defined evil as "a certain absence of good" (Summa Theologica, pt. I, q. 48, art. 1).

In answer to the question whether God as the summum bonum could be the cause of evil, Aquinas answers, not of the evil which consists in defect of action (fault); but with regard to "the corruption of some things" the answer is yes. This was extended to explain the problem of death. Aquinas writes: "'God made not death' (Wisd. I. 13)," but it is "a condition of matter" (Summa, pt. II, 1, q. 85, art. 6). Such is the condition of matter that it displays various weaknesses.

This defect of nature was supplied by God, who also gave man "a certain incorruptibility" while he was in a state of innocence. By choosing to disobey God, man also chose death. In this way Aquinas can say both that God did not make death and that death is the punishment of sin. Thus Aquinas writes:

Now, the order of the universe requires, as was said, above . . . that there should be some things that can, and do sometimes, fail. And thus God, by causing in things the good of the order of the universe, consequently and as it were by accident, causes the corruptions of things, according to I Kings 2. 6: 'The Lord killeth and maketh alive.' But when we read that 'God hath not made death' (Wis. I. 13), the sense is that God does not will death for its own sake. Nevertheless the order of justice belongs to the order of the universe, and this requires that penalty be dealt out to sinners. And so God is the author of the evil which is penalty, but not of the evil which is fault" (Summa, pt. I, q. 49, art. 2).

In this way medieval thinkers attempted to separate God from the burden of having created death outright. Williams states that the cause of death was variously attributed to "man or the devil or sin." "God was in no case the cause of death even though he made it possible."⁶

The medieval practice of personifying Death separated God from death even further. Death could be, and was, thought of as an independent, malevolent personality, thus freeing God from direct association with death.

The Lamentor and Death

The figure of the lamentor upon the death of a friend or beloved occurs frequently throughout the literature of the Middle Ages. In his study of the medieval view of death, Der Todesgedanke in der deutschen Dichtung vom Mittelalter bis zur Romantik, Walter Rehm characterizes the medieval attitude in such laments as a resigned expression of dismay at the sadness and inevitability of death.⁷ Criticism or questioning of the institution of death were excluded. Most of the examples Rehm cites express fear of death, warnings of its suddenness,

and admonitions about the transience of life. The passive and resigned attitude described by Rehm can be seen in the words of Walther von der Vogelweide: "sündig lîp vergezzen, / dir sint diu jâr gemezzen: / der tât hat uns besezzen / die veigen âne wer," (77. vv. 32-33) and in those of Frauenlob: "Waz half ir kunst unt wîser sin? / der tât der nam si dan noch hin, / got selbe enmochte niht dem tôde entwîchen."⁸ The only example of a real outcry recognized by Rehm is Enite's speech in Hartmann's Erec:

sî sprach, 'wê dir, vil ûbeler Tât!
daz dû verfluochet sîst!
wie manec bilde dû gist
dîner unbescheidenheit!'⁹
(vv. 5914-17)

Rehm calls it "eine . . . Anklage des Todes, die in der Zeit allein bleibt und erst wieder in des Ackermanns Gespräch mit dem Tod eine noch gewaltigere, zeitsymbolische Nachfolge findet" (p. 54).

In contrast to Rehm, however, Johannes Kleinstück points out numerous examples of medieval laments expressing hatred, criticism, and even cursing of death.¹⁰ In Chrétien's Cliges, for example, the knight, Cliges, curses death who, he believes, has robbed him of his beloved Fenice: "'Ha morz,' fet il, 'come ies villaine'" (v. 6238).¹¹ In two poems of Eustache Deschamps (1346-1406) the lamenter cries: "Enemie de toute creature / Et de tout ce qui avoir naissance," and "Mort mauvaise, maleureuse et dolente. . ."¹² The words of Dante's Vita Nuova are still stronger: "Villainous Death . . . my tongue wears itself out in cursing you."¹³

Examples in German literature of hatred of death are numerous as well. In addition to Enite's "wê dir, vil ûbeler Tât!" (Erec, v. 5914), we find: "hêr tât, ich bin iu gehaz" (Wolfdietrich, (G), v. 87).¹⁴ In

Mai und Beafloer: "Tot, du bist et immer / unbescheiden, als man seit"
(p. 150, vv. 18-19).¹⁵ Far from being passively accepted, death is criticized frequently, particularly for his caprice and injustice in taking the wrong victims:

owê dir, unbescheiden tât!
du nimest mangel schoenen lîp
und laest vil wundernaltiu wîp
leben gar über ir zil.
(Wigalois, vv. 11387-90)¹⁶

In the Dialogus Mortis cum Homine the speaker inquires of death whether he does not reap with his sickle only "ripe grain," saying if death should do otherwise, he would not be a good harvester. Death answers that he takes the young grain if it pleases him to do so and is not bothered by the man's opinion.¹⁷ In the Briefwechsel zwischen Leben und Tod death is criticized because he doesn't even spare children.¹⁸ Still, however, such outcries do not go beyond cursing and hating of death.

In courtly society God was seen as the essence of all courtly virtues. People of the time found it difficult to reconcile unpleasant traits with this view of God. Death was seen as an anomaly, an intruder, and berated for his unchivalrous behavior.¹⁹ People did not understand how God could tolerate such a servant and wondered at God's patience in allowing death to behave as he does. But, as Kleinstück notes, this did not extend to criticism of God's government of the world: "[E]s geht nur über ihr Begriffsvermögen, dass etwas geschieht, das nicht geschehen sollte" (p. 52). They did not really confront the relationship between death's function and God.

In some dialogues between a man or some other figure and death which preceded the Ackermann, there is indirect criticism of death, but

no rebellion against it or challenging of death's right to function as he does. In the Dialogus Mortis cum Homine a man, frightened by death's terrible appearance, asks who death is, where he comes from, why he is so horrible and whether or not he reaps with his sickle only ripe grain. Death's answers to these questions emphasize his dreadfulness, power and arbitrariness. He is a strict and awesome judge. The man begs for mercy, and there is no questioning of death's right to exercise his prerogative as he does. In the Briefwechsel zwischen Leben und Tod life reproaches death for his terribleness, but criticism is limited to complaints that death does not even spare children. He is called horrible and impious. In this case death regrets his cruel function and begs to be released from it by God. But there is no actual questioning of God himself. In the Legende von der Todes-Vision des Magister Polycarp Polycarpus is granted the chance to talk to death, to ask why he is so bitter for men.²⁰ Polycarpus is so shattered by the encounter with death that he enters a religious order. Again there is no rebellion or attack on death. The strongest criticism in these works is limited to dismay over death's unjust and arbitrary ways. Some wonder briefly how God can tolerate such a bad servant.

The strongest criticism to be found is of the mild kind uttered by Ulrich von Türheim, whose words do imply a certain censure of God's justice:

ich bin dem tôde gar gehaz,
 war umb tuot unser herre daz
 daz er die vromen gar hin nimt
 und in der boesen niht gezimt?
 zwäre daz ist wunderlîch.
 ich von Türheim Uolrîch
 lieze tûsent boese sterben,
 ê einen vrumen verderben.²¹
 (vv. 3591-98)

How rare attacks on God's justice in condoning death were, is illustrated by the single example cited in Richmond's survey of Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative.²² Bishop Turpin in the Sage of Melayne learns from Roland that many knights have been slain, and, "Casting his staff and mitre away, he vows never to wear them again and demands why Mary so rewarded men who fought for her" (p. 72). Richmond calls this "not simply a reaction against the established order of the kingdom, but also an aggressive defiance of the accepted divine order" (p. 72). Her statement that "there is no other lament like this one in any other romance" (p. 73) indicates how inconceivable was any real attack on the injustice of death's functioning or on God's justice in condoning it.

The Plowman in Tepl's Ackermann attacks death more aggressively than does the protagonist of any preceding work. He considers not only the question of the justness and impartiality of death's functioning, but also the reason for its very existence in God's world order and thus, indirectly, God's justice in condoning death. The Plowman exceeds earlier criticisms by accusing Death in legal terms, in forcing Death to defend the rationale for his existence, and in demanding directly a decision from God. In the long line of lamenters he is the first to confront Death without being intimidated by Death's terrible power and by his own transience.

Two Late Medieval Attitudes Toward Death

As can be seen from the differences between the conclusions drawn by Rehm and those of Kleinstück and Williams, there is little agreement among authorities as to what the prevailing late medieval attitude in regard to death was. Many have suggested, as does Huizinga, that the age was one of extremely morbid preoccupation with the physical side of

death. Dubruck suggests that, although there were two possible fates for the soul after death--eternal blessedness or hell--attention was increasingly focused on the horrible aspect. Medieval man "seems to have been more preoccupied--often with near pathological insistence--with the horrors of death."²³

It is true that the plague of 1348-50, which killed some twenty-five million Europeans,²⁴ was accompanied by a violent fear of death and a morbid interest in its macabre aspect, including the gruesomely realistic depiction in art of the process of decay. Describing this period, Huizinga asserts that "No other epoch has laid so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death."²⁵ Yet alongside the fear and horror which characterized late medieval literature on death, the mystics wrote songs of praise to death, viewing it as the last obstacle to the life beyond and union with God, as the "exitus vitae, introitus melioris,"²⁶ One example of this attitude is to be found in Johann von Neumarkt's translation of the mystical Leben des heiligen Hieronymus, which refers to death as "des ewigen lebens pforte," exclaiming, "O du frolicher suzzer tod! o wie er irret, der dich tod nennet."²⁷

Indeed, even Huizinga, who describes the late medieval obsession with a morbid view of death, does not present an exclusively negative picture. Along with his description of the fear and horror, the "lamentation about the briefness of all earthly glory," he also mentions the opposite aspect: "jubilation over the salvation of the soul" (p. 135). He depicts the extremes to which both views were carried rather than the exclusiveness of either attitude.

Mary Pecheux has argued that alongside the negative view of

death, there was also a more optimistic and hopeful view which emphasized that death was the servant of a higher power and was actually God's messenger. She holds that this attitude became increasingly dominant in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, eventually subordinating the morbid, fearful view.²⁸

Although Rosenfeld's study of the medieval Dance of Death corroborates Pechoux's contention that the trend was away from abject horror at the spectre of death, other researchers suggest that the greatest preoccupation with the gruesomeness of death occurred in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and even seventeenth centuries.²⁹ Peter von Moos stresses the need for further research on the subject (Bd. III, 108).

I would suggest that one reason for the many conflicting descriptions of the medieval attitude is the fact that there were two separate and fundamentally incompatible traditions in regard to death, both functioning at the same time. The two attitudes reflect not just the possibility that death could lead either to heaven or hell, but a folk tradition and a Christian tradition.

The folk tradition, which featured an evil, gleeful, malicious figure of death, is best represented in the literature and murals depicting the Totentanz, the Dance of Death. This tradition probably originated with the superstition that the dead rose at night to dance in graveyards and could draw unsuspecting passersby with them. The idea of the dancing dead evolved into the dancing figure of death, a rapacious, cruel, grinning figure who attacked his victims in all ranks of society, unexpectedly and inexorably. Contrasting with this view was the Christian tradition which pictured death as the servant of God and advocated that death, for the faithful, was not to be feared,

but calmly and hopefully accepted as the passage to eternal life.

During the late medieval period the two traditions seem to have existed side by side with very little amalgum between them. Elements of the Totentanz themes such as the unexpectedness, inexorableness, universality, and impartiality of death as well as an emphasis on physical decay are to be found frequently in medieval literature. The positive view, which asserts that death is not to be feared because Christ has conquered it and promises eternal bliss for the redeemed, is to be found as well. But in the dialogues with death which preceded the Ackermann, such as the Dialogus Mortis cum Homine, the Briefwechsel zwischen Leben und Tod, and the Legende von der Todes-Vision des Magister Polycarp, the attitudes of fear and horror predominate.

The Ackermann contains a mixture of the two groups of themes. The relationship between them will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Archetypal Experience: Suffering, Insight, Questioning

Both the book of Job and the Ackermann aus Böhmen deal with what might be called the archetypal situation of a man in the prime of life who suddenly and unexpectedly is brought low by a cruel misfortune. The experience of a fall from a secure and happy life brings with it new insight into the world's misery.

Both Blank and Hübner envision the Plowman to be a man in his forties.³⁰ Job is portrayed by H. G. Wells, in his novel The Undying Fire, as a man "of little more than fifty."³¹ Although Job's age is not specifically given in the Old Testament book, he cannot be extremely old, since Eliphaz reminds him that some of ~~the~~ three friends are older than Job's father (15:10). Job's children are mentioned in the prologue.

Some or all of them must be grown, but there is no mention of grandchildren until his restoration in the epilogue.

The Plowman seems to be a man of comfortable circumstances. He recalls the respect his wife enjoyed in the community (chapter ix, 9-12) and that she was of noble birth (vii, 7-8). He himself is an educated "man of the pen": "von vogelwat ist mein pflug" (iii, 1). Job likewise is in every way a man in his prime, having, in addition to his many children, such vast possessions that he is known as "the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3).

Both formerly lived in a state of idyllic happiness. The Plowman says: "Frut und fro was ich vormals zu aller stunt; kurz und lustsam was mir alle weil, tag und nacht" (iii, 11-13).³² Job describes himself in former days with the words: "my roots spread out to the waters, / with the dew all night on my branches, / my glory fresh with me, / and my bow ever new in my hand" (29:19-20).

Yet each falls into a state of wretchedness and misery as a result of an unexpected calamity, which breaks into that idyllic life with other-worldly force. For the Plowman it is the premature death of his wife. For Job it is a series of terrible catastrophies including the death of his children, a loathsome disease, and loss of all his worldly goods and reputation. Their present wretched state contrasts starkly with their former happiness and is depicted in vivid images. The Plowman says:

Nu wirt zu mir gesprochen schabab! Bei trübem trank, auf
dürrem ast, betrübt, swarz und zerstört beleib ich und
heule on underlass. Also treibt mich der wind, ich swim
dahin durch des wilden meres flüss, die tunnen haben
überhant genomen, mein anker haftet niergent (iii, 15-19).

Job cries:

My spirit is broken, my days are extinct . . .
 He has made me a byword of the peoples,
 and I am one before whom men spit.
 My eye has grown dim from grief,
 and all my members are like a shadow.
 (17:1, 6-7)

In neither case can sufficient cause for the tragic events be found in the sins of the sufferer. The seeming inappropriateness, the cruel and unusual nature of their suffering, causes them to reexamine their assumptions about the moral order of the universe. Each finds a contradiction between his religious beliefs and his experience, between belief in the justice of God's world order and his personal experience of injustice.

In the Ackermann the experience of suffering, or leit, is acknowledged by God with a certain regard. It results in a confrontation with the truth. God says to the combatants: "der krieg ist nicht gar on sach. Ir habt beide wol gefochten: den twinget leit zu klagen, disen die anfechtung des klagers die warheit zu sagen" (xxxiii, 15-17).

In both works the archetypal sequence of suffering-insight-questioning is climaxed by the intervention of the supernatural. In the end it is the encounter with God which triumphs over the experience of suffering. It is not a victory of faith over reason in abstract terms, but rather of the experience of God over the experience of suffering.

The Question of the Biographical Background

The protagonists in both debates are drawn with a great deal of dramatic life. They do not simply argue abstractly about an academic question. Each has a personal stake in the outcome of the issue and argues in an involved way. So much so, in fact, that the outcries and

intense personal expressions of grief in both works have led to speculation on whether or not they were written out of the personal experience of the authors or whether they are the products of purely creative imagination.

In the case of Job many interpreters have suggested, as does G. Uellenberg, that the author of the dialogue seems to be speaking, "von selbsterlebter Qual."³³ The author, of course, cannot be Job himself, for the legend goes back long before the book was composed. The historical Job, if there was one, would have lived much earlier. But perhaps the author was someone who had also experienced a severe reversal in life and chose the story of Job as a vehicle for dealing with the problem of suffering.

The difficulty with this suggestion lies in the fact that most scholars believe the book to have been composed over a long period of time and by several authors. Samuel Terrien explains that the traditional method of composing such a poem was probably similar to the practice of Bedoin tribes of today--a kind of community effort which is carried out by the whole tribe seated around the fire at night. Each evening part of the poem is retold; new phrases are tried out by the tribal poet and approved or disapproved as the group repeats them. If approved, the additions are repeated on the following night. In this way they become part of the tribal memory. Several generations of poets may work on one particular theme.³⁴ Still, however, it is through the inspiration of the poet that the poem is built up. And the impetus for his contributions no doubt grows out of his own experience. Thus it is difficult to rule out the influence of personal experience.

Not all are in agreement, however, as to the authorship of the

various parts of the book. Pope suggests that:

in the heart of the book, in the Dialogue (chs. iii-xxxi), there is a characteristic literary excellence which suggests the influence of a single personality. . . . There can be no question that we are confronted with a poet of genius, for his work has been acclaimed as one of the great masterpieces of world literature. . . . The poet had himself probably experienced physical and mental agony, since it is hard to understand how one could have written thus without personal knowledge of suffering.³⁵

In the case of the Ackermann the question is likewise undecided. Many have felt that the intense emotion in the outcries of the Plowman and the words of the closing prayer, "Mich reuet Margaret, mein auserweltes weib" (xxxiv, 69-70), seem to be personally felt. The strongest argument that the work has a biographical basis comes from Willy Krogmann, who points to the many biographical details which otherwise would have no reason to be in the work.³⁶ Such personal references include the naming of the Plowman's wife and the city in which she lived, the exact date of her death, the mention of the surviving children, and the acrostic in the final prayer: IOHANNES MA. All of these details agree with the facts which are known about the author's life.

In addition, the phrase in the author's accompanying letter to his friend Peter Rothirsch: "Karitas, que nos homines floride inventutis vinuit, me hortatur et cogit, vestri memoria consolari" has been interpreted by some as evidence that the author, and possibly Rothirsch too, had recently suffered a bereavement.³⁷ The difficulty stems from the translation of the word consolari which can be either passive or deponent. Heilig translates the sentence as follows: "Die Liebe, welche uns in Blüte, Jugend, Männlichkeit einte, veranlasst und verpflichtet mich, Euer eingedenk Euch zu trösten," but adds that the

last three words can also be translated "mich zu trösten" and would then be a reference to the author's own bereavement.³⁸

Anton Blaschka, however, rejects both theories on the grounds that the phrase is merely an example of the traditional topos, letter-writing as consolation for the letter-writer.³⁹ The consolation referred to is simply that of communicating with the person from whom the writer is separated and was a standard introduction to a letter.

Since the discovery of Tepl's letter to Peter Rothirsch, many have become convinced that the work is primarily a rhetorical exercise. Hübner calls it a "stilistisches Paradestück,"⁴⁰ Bäuml states emphatically: "The fact that the Ackermann was intended by its author to be a rhetorical exercise can no longer be denied."⁴¹ Others, however, suggest that to regard the work as a stylistic exercise does not exclude the possibility of a biographical background.⁴² Hahn observes: "So kann aber--muss es nicht!--der Aufwand in der Durchgestaltung des Formalen, der grosse Ornat, . . . gerade und im Gegenteil dafür zeugen, wie tiefernt das Behandelte genommen ist."⁴³

The question whether or not the Ackermann is based on a real event will be important later in considering whether or not the final prayer is part of the debate or an epilogue spoken by the author. If it can be established that the author himself did not suffer a bereavement, then the references to a lost wife must be the words of the Plowman.

The book of Job also contains certain biographical details about Job, his family and his friends. We learn, for instance, that Job was a prince of the Land of Uz (Edom). We are told the number of his children, the size of his flocks, that his servants were killed by

the Sabeans and Caldeans, the number of years he lived after his ordeal, and the names of the three daughters who were born to him after his fortunes were restored. We are also told the names and families of the three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, as well as of Elihu. Although it cannot be argued that this biographical information is anything other than fictitious or at best legendary, the work is no less valid for the author's not having experienced all the misfortunes of Job. Regardless of whether or not the biographical details of either work have a basis in fact, the problems dealt with in the debates are universally real.

The Judicial Theme

Both the Ackermann and the book of Job in several respects resemble a judicial proceeding. In both cases there is an injured party who senses that there has been a miscarriage of justice and appeals for justice to God. Although neither work is framed as a full-fledged legal case, both make use of the judicial theme and at times affect the tone of a court proceeding.

Although Job himself has not witnessed the scene in heaven, he rightly senses that he is on trial. He protests against what he feels to be cruel and unusual punishment, defending himself boldly in legal terminology. He declares: "But I would speak to the Almighty, / and I desire to argue my case with God" (13:3). "I would lay my case before him / and fill my mouth with arguments. . . . There an upright man could reason with him, / and I should be acquitted for ever by my judge" (23:4,7). "Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!" (31:35). "Behold, I have prepared my case; / I know that

I shall be vindicated" (13:18). "O that my vexation were weighed, / and all my calamity laid in the balances!" (6:2). "Let me be weighed in a just balance, / and let God know my integrity!" (31:6). "For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,/that we should come to trial together" (9:32). "[T]hou knowest that I am not guilty" (10:7).

Job is confident that, given a fair hearing, he would be acquitted. He believes in a man's rights before God: "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, / and he that vouches for me is on high. . . . My eye pours out tears to God, / that he would maintain the right of a man with God, / like that of a man with his neighbor" (16:19, 20-21). He says of God: "[A]n upright man could reason with him" (23:7).

Job's last recourse is to an ancient legal procedure, the traditional "oath of clearance" which takes the form of a negative confession.⁴⁴ The negative confession was made to vindicate one's public honor, but "it was addressed to God in an appeal against human judgment."⁴⁵ In performing it the accused calls on God to curse him if it should be true that he has committed a crime. Pope writes of the oath of clearance:

The taking of an oath was the last word in assertion of innocence, tantamount to acquittal, since it was assumed that the terror of the sanctions of the self-imprecations would deter anyone from swearing falsely. After the oaths there is no more the friends can say. It is now up to God to strike down the blasphemer or acquit him (p. lxxii).

In his oath Job lists a long series of crimes of which he has been accused in the implications of the friends, as well as some which they have not thought of. He names the punishments that should befall him if he is guilty. For example, he declares: "If I have walked with falsehood, / and my foot has hastened to deceit; . . . then let

me sow, and another eat" (31:5-8). "If I have withheld anything that the poor desired . . . if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, . . . then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, / and let my arm be broken from its socket" (31:16-22).

Job ends his oath with the resolute cry: "Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!" (31:35). He now feels confident that he will be vindicated. Willing to give account of all his steps (31:37), he likens the imagined indictment to a crown which he would wear to approach his accuser "like a prince" (31:36-37).

But it is not merely his own vindication that Job wishes. His most urgent hope is that God will vindicate Himself. Job realizes that the moral order is at stake. If there is no moral order in the world, if God is not to be trusted, then there is nothing left for Job himself. The frightening aspect of the debate at this stage is that it is difficult to see how both Job and God can be right. If Job is right about his integrity and God is allowing him to suffer unjustly or simply for no reason at all, then Job also loses. If Job is wrong about his integrity and God is just in punishing him, then Job cannot trust his own conscience or his ability to judge himself. It seems an insoluble dilemma. Both must be vindicated in order that there be a rational moral order in the world. Job is confident that this will somehow happen.

Tepl's Ackermann also contains elements of a judicial proceeding and places emphasis on the concept of justice which the Middle Ages saw as residing in, and emanating from, God. The opening of the debate begins with the traditional cry of murder or cry for help, the ceremonial opening to a medieval judicial proceeding, naming and

cursing the accused: "Grimmiger vertilger aller leut, schedlicher durchechter aller werlt, freissamer mörder aller menschen, her Tot, euch sei verflucht!" (i, 1-2). Eckhart calls it a "feststehende mittelalterliche Prozessformel."⁴⁶ According to Philipppson the gerüfte or Zetergeschrei was "the strongest form of accusation in German medieval law" and "was only in order when there was no doubt whatever concerning the guilt of the murderer and the findings of the court, the gerüfte itself meant outlawing the respondent by means of the severest form of impeachment" (p. 268).

Although the specific form of a legal proceeding is not carried beyond the first chapter, the question of Death's guilt or innocence continues to be pursued by the Plowman: "Ir habt sie alle und meine schöne und zarte ermort . . . Wer ist daran schuldig?" (xvii,19-20). As in the book of Job the theme of recht or justice is of paramount importance. The Plowman's sense of justice is outraged by the loss of his wife. Something is terribly wrong in the world order if this crime goes unredressed. He is confident of his right to legal recourse as the injured party and calls on God to take his part and avenge him for the miscarriage of justice. Death is surprised at this unexpected attack but aims to prove that he is within his rights. The Plowman, because of his conviction that God is the source and essence of all justice, fully expects God also to be outraged by this offense against His order. Like Job, the Plowman appeals to God to be his judge and is confident that the outcome will be a fair judgment of the case. The roles of plaintiff and accused are reinforced by the repeated use of the words recht, unrecht, rechtfertig, Gerechtigkeit, etc. It is the primary concern of each combatant to establish the legality of his claim.

The Plowman's claim to justice is based on his view of God as "mein, euer und aller welt rechter richter" (xix,19-20). He contrasts God's character as the true dispenser of justice with that of Death, the false judge, saying: "Richte, herre, richte über den falschen richter!" (xv,23-24). "Werlich, herre, in deiner wûrkung ist . . . nicht ungerechters dann der Tot!" (xv,18-20). His repeated use of the word recht and the contrast with God's justice is most striking in chapter xvii, where it becomes an ironic chant: "Ir sprechet faste, wie rechte ir richtet . . . Ist das rechte gericht? . . . sagen wir lob und ere dem Tot, der also rechte richtet! Gotes gerichte ist kaum also gerecht" (xvii,21-22, 3-33).

The Plowman repeatedly emphasizes his injured-party status: "Werlich, so kurz geschach nie manne!" (xix,15-16). He stresses his legal right to restitution for his loss, alternately feigning restraint and making exaggerated threats of vengeance. "[W]ie unrechte ir an mir habt gefahren, . . . geriche [ich] es nicht, als ich zu rechte sollte: . . . ich getrauet euch wol, ir wûrdet euer gerechtigkeit (or "ungerechtigkeit" in some versions⁴⁷) selbs erkennen, darnach mir genügen tun noch grosser untat. . . . Anders es müsste der hamer den amboss treffen" (xix, 10-11, 21-23). It is essential to his view of the world that justice be done: "Hilfe, rates und widerbringens seit ir mir pflichtig, wann ir habt mir getan den schaden. . . . gerochen müsst es werden--weder dann got het in seiner allmechtigkeit nindert rachung!" (xxi,16-19).

Numerous as the Plowman's references to justice in his complaint may be, those of Death are even more frequent. Death, in fact, is the first to mention the issue. Although he does not feel threatened by

the Plowman, he expresses an interest in vindicating himself on legal grounds, and in showing that his activity is just and lawful. He says: "Rechtfertig wellen wir werden, rechtfertig ist unser gefert" (ii,19-20). In his second speech he objects: "[D]u tust uns heftiglichen unrecht" (iv,3). Again, in his third speech, he clearly states his stake in the debate: "Wir wellen beweisen, das wir rechte wegen, rechte richten und rechte faren in der werlt" (vi,6-7).

Death argues that it is the Plowman who is overstepping his bounds: "Du fluchest und bittest rachtung unverschultlich und on notdurft" (xii,2-3) "Falsches gerichtes beziehestu uns; uns tustu unrecht. Das wellen wir dich beweisen" (xvi,2-3). Death, too, sees the matter in legal terms: "Was ein mensche entlehent, das sol es widergeben. . . . jegliches mensche ist uns ein sterben schuldig und in angeerbt zu sterben" (xx,12-13, 16-17). "[W]ir hetten dich gütlich underweiset, das du nicht billichen den tot deines weibes klagen soltest und beweinen" (xx,4-5).

He bases his claim to lawfulness on the fact that he is God's tool and completely impartial: "Wir sein gotes hantgezeuge, . . . ein rechte würekender meder" (xvi,4-5). Of his impartiality he boasts: "Sihe, das ist rechtfertigkeit! Uns haben rechtfertig geteilt die Römer und die poeten" (xvi,9-10).

The justice of God's world order and ultimately of God himself is no less important to Tepl's Plowman than to Job, his more outspoken predecessor. His question how Death can be seen to function justly and with God's sanction unavoidably points up the inadequacies in the concept of God which the Plowman has held up to now.

The Concept of Justice

The Relationship between Suffering and God

Although both works deal with the question of justice, in particular the justice of the world order, their conceptions of God's nature and their views of His relationship to suffering and death differ. Job has a very clear understanding of the relationship between his suffering and God. It is God who is directly responsible for it. He says to his wife, who has urged him to curse God and die: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10). To his friends, the comforters, Job exclaims: "Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? / In his hand is the life of every living thing / and the breath of all mankind" (12:9-10). Feeling the full weight of his misfortunes, he cries: "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; . . . the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (6:4). Although the Job of the prologue differs in his outlook from the Job of the debate, their attitudes on this point are the same. The impressive and moving first words spoken by Job after the news of his terrible loss in the prologue leave no doubt about his idea of the relationship between his suffering and God: "Then Job arose, and rent his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshipped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD'" (1:20-21).

Although the prologue depicts Satan as the initiator and agent of Job's sufferings, with God's permission, neither Job nor his friends ever think of attributing any of his misery to Satan. For Job

the problem of suffering is the problem of God.

The Plowman, in sharp contrast to Job, has a contradictory and confused idea as to the cause of his suffering. While he accuses Death of being the immediate cause, he also knows that God is in control of Death. Rather than openly criticizing God, however, he tries to separate the two, calling on God to avenge him on evil Death.

His awareness that God has power over Death is not something that develops during the debate; it is there from the outset. In his opening speech he pointedly calls God the creator of Death: "Got, euer tirmen, hasse euch" (i,3). Again in chapter xv he states that Death is part of God's creation: "Werlich, herre, in deiner wûrkung ist nicht greulicheres, . . . nicht ungerechters dann der Tot!" (xv,18-20). He repeatedly acknowledges God's power over Death: "Got, der mein und euer gewaltig ist, getraue ich wol, er werde mich vor euch beschirmen" (xi,1-2). "[S]olichen lon . . . schicke euch, der des todes und lebens gewaltig sei!" (xiii,22-24).

Although he recognizes that God is responsible for death, at the same time he indicates that Death acts independently of God and against God's wishes. He calls him God's enemy, inciting God to destroy him: ". . . vertilge den greulichen Tot, der dein und aller unser feint ist! . . . Er betrûbt und verordnet dir alle dein irdische herschaft" (xv,16-18 , 20-21). To Death he says: "Got beraube euch euer macht" (v, 19). He clearly asserts that it is not God who has caused his suffering but Death, independently and maliciously. There are only two possible sources of his misfortune, Death and God, and, since God certainly has not done it, Death must be responsible: "Auch weiss ich wol, das soliches gewaltes sunder got und euer niemant ist

gewaltig. So bin ich von got nicht also geplaget: . . . Ir seit der übelteter!" (xv,6-10).

The Plowman's contradictory view of the relationship between Death and God seems to result from his concept of God as a kind of chivalrous ideal. The Plowman stresses in particular two aspects of God's character. He sees God as a gentle, benevolent comforter. He calls him a "milter loner" (xi,19), "aller betrübten herzen tröster" (xv,15), "Der milte got, der mechtige herre" (ix,3-4). In addition, God is a knightly righter of wrongs, an avenger of injustices. By far the most frequently used description depicts him as avenger, sometimes coupled with praise of his gentleness: "Der milte got, der mechtige herre, gereche mich an euch" (ix,3-5). "Eia Got, aller betrübten herzen tröster, tröste mich und ergetze mich" (xv,15-16). "Got! aller untat gerecher!" (xiii,27). "[S]ünde übersehen und gerochen hat got biss her" (xxxi,18-19). "[G]erochen müsst es werden--weder dann got het in seiner allmechtigkeit nindert rachtung!" (xxi,18-19). "Got, . . . getraue ich wol, er werde mich vor euch beschirmen und . . . strenglich an euch gerechen" (xi,1-3).

This chivalrous view of God contributes to the Plowman's contradictory conception of the relationship between God and Death. It has been mentioned that the courtly Middle Ages epitomized God as the essence of all courtly virtues and tried to divest God of unpleasant traits in order to make him comformable to the courtly ideal. Death, in contrast, was hated for his extreme, unchivalrous behavior. As examples of medieval laments over death have shown, it was possible to curse and hate Death without directly implicating God. Some writers went so far as to wonder how God could tolerate such a servant, but to

criticize God himself, or His justice, was virtually unthinkable. By trying to separate death's function from God's the Plowman puts himself in the inconsistent position of calling on God to defend him against God's own world order.

We learn from God's verdict in the contest that He approves of death, including the death of the Plowman's wife, and acknowledges His own ultimate responsibility. The Plowman's insistence that God cannot approve is shown to be wrong, and after the verdict revenge on Death is never mentioned again. An analysis of the text to follow shows that Tepl purposely characterized the Plowman's concept of God as naive and contradictory, and Death in the negative light of the Totentanz tradition, in order to replace both views at the end with a more mature and complete picture of God and His relationship to the world.

One important contributing factor to the contradictory view of the relationship between God and death was the medieval practice of personifying the figure of death. Throughout the middle ages death was commonly regarded as a real being and was personified as a malicious individual who attacked his victims from outside. Kleinstück states: "Mit naiver Selbstverständlichkeit reden Chrétien, Dante, die Troubadours and andere vom Tode, als ob er jemand wäre. . . . Sicher glaubten im Mittelalter viele Menschen, dass wirklich ein Wesen 'Tod' auf der Erde tätig sei. . . ." (p. 54). One of many such examples of the personification of death is found in Hartmann's Erec, where Enite, distraught and believing Erec to be dead, no longer wishes to live. She tries to lure death by claiming to have suddenly fallen in love with him and offers to become death's bride:

dem bin ich gâhes worden holt.
 hete ich umbe den versolt
 daz im geviele mîn lîp,
 dem wolde ich sîn ein staetez wîp
 vil lieber Tôt, nû meine ich dich.
 (vv. 5882-86)

That this notion had begun to change by the fourteenth century can be seen in Chaucer's spoof of the idea in his "Pardoner's Tale" in the Canterbury Tales, 1387-1400.⁴⁸ The fear of the Totentanz figure as an actual being has been largely overcome by the time of Holbein's Totentanz of 1526 in which the figure of death has become a symbol of mortality rather than the terrifying apparition which dominated earlier versions. Rosenfeld says:

Dieser Tod hat keinerlei metaphysische Wirklichkeit mehr, ist nicht mehr die Gestalt, an der der mittelalterliche Mensch sich seiner Kreatürlichkeit bewusst wurde und erschauerte vor dem Unendlichen. Der Holbeinische Tod ist lediglich eine Mahnung an die Vergänglichkeit, . . .⁴⁹ eine Hieroglyphe für 'Sterben' geworden. (p. 284, 289)

Kurtz writes that Corozet, the author of the text accompanying the 1538 edition of Holbein's Totentanz, no longer regards death as a person but as a concept.⁵⁰

The view expressed in the Ackermann seems to have already broken away from strict personification of the figure. Although Death speaks and acts the part of a personality, his own description of himself indicates that he is to be conceived of in ways other than strict personification. Although the Plowman refers to him as a person, calling him "tummer man" (ix,20) and complaining, "O, her Tot, alle werlt klagt über euch . . . und auch ich, das nie so böser man wart" (xxi,9-10), yet Death speaks of himself not as a person, but as an event, "ein geschickte," saying he has no form and is not alive:

Wir sein nichts und doch etwas. Deshalben nichts, wann wir weder leben noch wesen noch gestalt noch understant haben, nicht geist sein, nicht sichtig sein, nicht greiflich sein; deshalben etwas, wann wir sein des lebens ende, des wesens ende, des nichtwesens anfang, ein mittel zwischen in beiden. Wir sein ein geschickte, das alle leut fellet.
(xvi,11-16)

Elsewhere he says he is "unbeschreibenlich" or "unsichtig" (xvi,19). He seems to distinguish between what he is and the way he is depicted in works which describe him as a man. For instance, he says that he was painted in Rome "als ein man sitzend auf einem ochsen" (xvi,20-21). But he speaks of the man on the ox as "unser bedeutnüss" (xvi,26), indicating that the man only represents him. He recalls that Pythagoras once compared him to a man, one with basilisk's eyes or form: "Pictagoras geleichet uns zu eines mannes schein, der hat basiliskes gestalt" (or augen in some versions⁵¹) (xvi,27-28).

Although the Plowman still regards him as a personality, the figure of death has lost much of the fearsomeness of earlier medieval representations. The Plowman speaks to him unintimidated, as if to another person. This change in attitude toward Death indicates a breaking away from strict separation of God and death. The view expressed by the Plowman represents a popular medieval concept which is characterized as inadequate and is replaced at the end of the debate by a new understanding of God's nature, in the same way that the Plowman's predecessor, Job, is to learn that God is greater and more mysterious than he thought.

The Problem of Impartiality

A problem which is closely related to the question of God's connection with death and suffering is the issue of how these evils

are distributed in the world, assuming some responsibility for them on God's part. It is the idea that death and suffering do not seem to be meted out fairly which most concerns Job and the Plowman and which seems to contradict the idea of God's ultimate responsibility for them.

Since God is in control of everything, it would seem that suffering should always be commensurate with wrongdoing. This, in fact, was the official teaching in Job's time. It was the traditional belief in Israel and Mesopotamia that, under God's rule of the universe, evil was always punished and virtue rewarded. Just as suffering was always evidence of sin, early death was regarded as a punishment. Job's friends certainly believe this. They constantly affirm that the wicked die young and the righteous live to old age. Elihu says: "He does not keep the wicked alive, . . . The godless in heart cherish anger; / . . . They die in youth, / and their life ends in shame" (36:6, 13-14). Eliphaz claims that "The wicked man writhes in pain all his days" (15:20), and Zophar adds: "But the eyes of the wicked will fail; / all way of escape will be lost to them" (11:20). The causal connection between sin and suffering is strictly maintained. Eliphaz assures them that God does not send affliction for nothing: "For affliction does not come from the dust, / nor does trouble sprout from the ground" (5:6).

But Job's experience contradicts these traditional religious beliefs. The root of his conflict is, in fact, his knowledge that he is suffering innocently, that the magnitude of his sins does not justify the severity of his misfortunes. He repeatedly protests his innocence: "I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; / my heart does not reproach me for any of my days" (27:6); ". . . thou knowest that I am not guilty" (10:7). Job's righteousness is confirmed by God in

the prologue when he twice declares that "there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" (1:8). God admits to persecuting Job without just cause when He says to Satan: "He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause" (2:3).

His own experience of undeserved suffering causes him to observe the plight of others, and he becomes disturbed by what seems to be a distinct lack of justice in the government of the world. It is clear that the wicked often do prosper and are not punished. Job asks: "Why do the wicked live, / reach old age, and grow mighty in power? . . . Their houses are safe from fear, / and no rod of God is upon them. . . . They spend their days in prosperity, / and in peace they go down to Sheol" (21:7, 9, 13). "How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out? / That their calamity comes upon them? . . . the wicked man is spared in the day of calamity" (21:17, 30). There seems to be no difference between the lot of the good and that of the wicked:

It is all one; therefore I say,
he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.
When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.
The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the faces of its judges--
if it is not he, who then is it?
(9:22-24)

Angrily he cries: "Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty?
(24:1).

In contrast to the Plowman, it is precisely Job's clear view of the relationship of his suffering to God — the fact that he does not perceive his suffering as coming from some other hand — that the problem

arises. If God is not responsible for both good and evil, there is no Job dilemma.

The Plowman too is disturbed by the injustice he has experienced-- the loss of his virtuous wife. It is Death's terrible indiscriminateness and unpredictability that trouble him. He too feels that there should be some link between virtue and reward, that his wife should have been spared because of her exceptional goodness. He attacks Death for being unfair.

The Plowman's protest that Death functions unpredictably and unjustly is the traditional medieval complaint which we have seen in earlier laments. The fact that death is no respecter of persons had long been stressed and was a prominent theme of the Totenänze. Death was frequently berated for taking the virtuous and the young, and for often leaving the old, the infirm and the wicked. He seemed to spare life at the wrong time, refusing to act when he could have relieved pain and sorrow. He was particularly blamed for taking children. It was expected that death rightly should reap only the ripe grain.

This is also the Plowman's grievance. Why does Death take good people like his wife and leave evil ones? He says: ". . . ee das tüchtig dann das untüchtig nimt er hin; schedliche, alte, sieche, unnütze leute lesst er oft alhie, die guten und die nützen zückt er alle hin" (xv,21-23). He calls Death "den falschen richter" (xv,24). On the other hand, Death's own definition of justice is based on the assertion that he is impartial and not influenced by considerations of social class, beauty, wealth, etc."

. . . niemands adels schonen, grosser kunst nicht achten,
keinerlei schöne nicht ansehen, gabe, liebe, leit, alter,

jugent und allerlei sachen nicht wegen wir. Wir tun als
 die sunne, die scheint über gute und böse, wir nemen gute
 und böse in unseren gewalt.
 (vi,7-11)

The Plowman does not accept Death's claim to impartiality. How does it happen, he asks, "das sie dann mer disteln dann guter blumen und mer böser leut dann guter unversert lesst beleiben?" (xvii,9-10). He once personally witnessed a battle in which the outcome was far from fair: "In dem here etelich totet ir, etelich liesset ir leben. Mer knecht dann herren sach ich tot ligen; . . . Ist das rechte gemeet? Ist das rechte gericht?" (xvii,27-30).

To imply that Death should be impartial is a weak argument on the Plowman's part, since true impartiality would not necessarily spare his wife. Some good people would always be taken. Does the Plowman really think Death should be impartial? Or does he think he should be a judge and spare the virtuous as he suggests in chapter xv? He never actually argues that the virtuous should be rewarded with long life, yet he seems to think that it should be so, since God loves virtue and punishes sin: "Tugent lieb gehabt, bosheit gehasset, sünde übersehen und gerochen hat got biss her" (xxxi,18-19). He claims that God was his wife's protector because of her virtue: ". . . got was ir günstiger hanthaber. Er was auch mir günstig durch iren willen: heil, selde und gelücke stunden mir bei durch iren willen. Das het sie an got erworben und verdient, die reine hausere" (xi,15-18).

In implying that Death should judge more fairly, the Plowman reveals another misconception which he holds concerning the relationship between Death and God. He attributes to Death God's function as judge. That is, he confuses physical death with judgment. The church

had long made a distinction between physical death, which is the result of original sin (Adam's fall) and eternal death or damnation, which is the punishment of individual sin.⁵² Everyone is equally subject to physical death because of man's inherited guilt, but individual sins are to be judged by God. Only the first death, physical death, is the province of the Plowman's opponent in the debate. In repeatedly referring to Death as an unjust judge, he fails to recognize that judgment is a function exercised exclusively by God. Death, on the contrary, is only God's tool, and has been ordained by Him as a sort of impartial broom which keeps order in the universe by preventing it from becoming over populated: ". . . uns [hat] der mechtig aller werlt herzog befolhen, den worten das wir alle überflüssigkeit sullen ausreuten und ausjeten" (viii,4-6).

It is this very impartiality--an impartiality which implies no value judgments--that the Plowman objects to and is confused about. What is the mechanism that determines this random selection? Is it Death, or is it ultimately God? What is the rationale behind it? Is random selection equivalent to justice? Are not impartiality and partiality (justice) mutually exclusive? It is clear from all accounts that God created Death in paradise, and that all must die for man's inherited guilt. But it is not clear what determines when a person is to be taken. It would seem logical that true impartiality, and a real test of disinterested virtue, would be to allow everyone to live the same length of time. Why are some taken before their time? The argument of the impartial natural order of the universe still leaves unanswered the question why things should be so ordered. The Plowman implicitly questions the justice of God in ordering the world so

that the good can die young.

To suggest that there should be some connection between virtue and reward, as the Plowman does, or between sin and punishment, as Job does, involves a similar contradiction. If God were always to act in the way man expects and deems just, he would no longer be free.

The fact that all must die is not really what bothers the Plowman. He seems not to object to death in old age, but to the fact that some die before their time. He complains that his wife was taken too soon: "Zu frū ist sie mir entwischet, allzu schier habt ir mir sie enzūcket" (xiii,11-12). His objection is not to the inevitability of death but to the injustice of Death's exercise of his function.

In how far, then, does the Plowman actually challenge Death's right to exist? Although it is true that the Plowman directly calls on God to destroy Death saying: "[H]erre, . . . vertilge den greulichen Tot, der dein und aller unser feint ist!" (xv,16-18), the reason he gives has nothing to do with the justification for the institution of death itself. Instead he criticizes the capricious way in which Death carries out his function:

Er betrūbt und *verordnet dir alle dein irdische
herrschaft; ee das tūchtig dann^{sa} untūchtig nimt er hin;
shedliche alte, sieche, unnūtze leute lesst er oft
alhie, die guten und die nützen zūckt er alle hin.
(xv,20-23)

Death likewise defends himself by stressing his impartiality:

Wir sein gottes hantgezeuge, herre Tot, ein rechte
wūrkender meder. Unser sengse geet für sich: weiss,
schwarz, rot, braun, gel, grün, bla, gra und allerlei
glanz blumen und gras hauet sie für sich nider, ir
glanz, ir tugent, ir kraft nicht geachtet. . . . Sihe,
das ist rechtfertigkeit!
(xvi,4-9)

Both of them seem to confuse the question of Death's impartiality or fairness in exercising his function with the justification for the existence of the function itself. To say that someone kills men and women in equal numbers is not a justification for the killing. Surprisingly, the charge of capriciousness is the most serious charge the Plowman makes against Death. He never gives any actual grounds for questioning Death's existence as an institution, although he behaves as though he does.

Like Job's friends, the Plowman expects the universe to operate in accordance with an absolute moral law. He expects that the natural order and the moral order should in some way coincide. But in the functioning of Death, natural law and moral law paradoxically do not seem to be related. The death of the Plowman's wife represents to him a chaotic breakdown of moral providence. In the Plowman's view, unlike that of Job, God simply cannot be responsible, he cannot be both creator and destroyer. To the Plowman God is exclusively the loving creator. It is Death who is the destroyer. This distinction is maintained to the last and is expressed in the Plowman's final words before God's appearance: "Des beruf ich mich mit euch an Got, meinen heilant, her Tot mein verderber!" (xxxix, 27-28).

The Plowman's insistence on seeing only one side of God and on attributing those functions that are difficult to deal with to Death, prevents him from coming to a satisfactory resolution of the issues during the debate itself.

Man's Relationship to God

An important feature of both debates is the staunch defense of the worth of man as God's creation by a beleaguered sufferer in circum-

stances which might otherwise be expected to make one despair of God's concern. Both defend man against cynical opponents who belittle the worth of man and the value of life. Although Job at first curses the day of his birth and wishes for death as an end to his misery, he nevertheless defends his own integrity in the strongest terms and the worth of the relationship between man and God.

His opponents skeptically ask at least three times: "Can mortal man be righteous before God? . . . those who dwell in houses of clay, / whose foundation is in the dust" (4:17-19). Eliphaz asks: "What is man, that he can be clean? / Or he that is born of woman, that he can be righteous?" (15:14). Bildad puts it most strongly: "How then can a man be righteous before God? . . . man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!" (25:4-6).

But although Job admits with them that life is pitifully short and full of trouble, Job has a far different view of man's relationship to God. He stresses another aspect of man--that of the beloved creature of a loving creator. The prime evidence Job cites for his conviction is the care with which God fashioned man:

Thy hands fashioned and made me;
 . . . (2 lines)
 Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh,
 and knit me together with bones and sinews.
 Thou hast granted me life and steadfast love;
 and thy care has preserved my spirit.
(10:8-12)

Job feels that he has integrity as God's creation and that a relationship of mutual responsibility exists between God and man because of God's creative care. Job maintains his integrity at all cost. His confidence in his own rights rests in turn on his belief in God's integrity:

This will be my salvation,
 that a godless man shall not come before him. . . .
 Behold, I have prepared my case;
 I know that I shall be vindicated.
 (13:16-18)

. . . there is no violence in my hands,
 and my prayer is pure. . . .
 Even now, behold my witness is in heaven,
 and he that vouches for me is on high.
 (16:17-19)

He is confident that he will be vindicated, saying: ". . . he that has clean hands grows stronger and stronger" (17: 9); "Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!" (31:6). Of God he asserts:

But he knows the way that I take;
 when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
 My foot has held fast to his steps;
 I have kept his way and have not turned aside.
 I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;
 (23:10-12)

He has sworn an oath of innocence and calls on God to answer: "Here is my signature! let the Almighty answer me!" (31:35). A stronger assertion of innocence and integrity could scarcely be imagined.

The friends insist that man is nothing to God: "Can a man be profitable to God? . . . Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, / or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless? (22:2-3). Yet we know, as Job does not, from the prologue that God is concerned with the righteousness of His creatures and that Job can do something for God.

Although Job's faith in God's justice and His special relationship to man is strong, it is threatened at its foundation. God may have fashioned man with great care, but Job's present diseased condition seems to belie God's loving concern for His creature. Job is struck

by the contradiction. He asks: "Your hands have formed me and made me, would You turn around and destroy me?" (10:8 Amplified Bible). Job defends himself on the basis of this past show of concern for man and God's consequent responsibility to deal justly with man: ". . . let me know why thou dost contend against me. / Does it seem good to thee to oppress, / to despise the work of thy hands . . . although thou knowest that I am not guilty" (10:2-3, 7).

Although God's ways are beyond man's comprehension, it is essential that there be some overlap between God's standards and man's if there is to be communication between the two. Though not bound by them, God must to some degree be just by man's standards.

A similar confidence in the worth of man as God's good creation characterizes the Plowman, and he is plagued by a similar contradiction: how can God, who created all things good and lovingly be the destroyer of his wife? The idea that her death should be God's will does not fit into his view of God as a chivalrous righter of wrongs.

The Plowman, like Job, views the care with which God fashioned man as evidence of his commitment to life. He praises man's similarity to God, his gift of reason, saying:

. . . der mensche ist das allerachtberst, das allerbehendest
und das allerfrei^{est} gotes werkstück. Im selber geleich
hat es got gebildet, als er auch in der ersten w^{irk}ung
der werlt selbs hat gesprochen. . . . Er ist allein der
lieblich kloss, dem geleich niemand dann got gew^{irk}ten
kan, darinnen so behende werk, alle kunst und meisterschaft
mit weisheit sint gew^{irk}et.

(xxv, 19-22, 39-42)

In criticizing man Death criticizes God, since man was created by God and in His own image. God created all things well and man as His most noble piece of work.

Like Job's friends, Death disparages the dignity and value of human life, accusing the Plowman of making more of man than he can be: "Dein kurze vernunft . . . will aus leuten mer machen dann sie gewesen mügen" (xxiv,6-7). Death attempts to discredit man by criticizing him from all angles. He exposes the baseness of his physical nature in chapter xxiv, reciting a whole list of the most repulsive aspects of man's physical body and calling him "ein kotfass, ein wurmspeise," etc.. He mocks man's gift of reason, citing the ineffectualness of all the sciences to save man from death (chapter xxvi) and satirizing man's achievements (chapter xviii). He detracts from love, married life, and women in general (chapter xxvii). His last two speeches describe the vanity, meanness, evils and transience of earthly life as a whole: ". . . alles, das in der werlt ist, ist entweder begerung des fleisch oder begerung der augen oder hochfart des lebens" (xxx,5-7). "Alles ist es ein eitekleit und ein serung der sele, vergenglichkeit, als der gestrig tag, der vergangen ist" (xxxii,34-35). According to Death man's lot is a truly wretched one: "O die tötliche menschheit ist stete in engsten, in trübsal, in leit, in besorgen, in forchten, in scheuhung, in weetagen, in siechtagen, in trauren, in betrübñüss, in jamer, in kumer und in mangerlei widerwertigkeit" (xxxii,37-40).

Although Job too recognizes with his friends that man's life is "of few days and full of trouble" (14:1), agreeing with Eliphaz that ". . . man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward" (5:7), Job does not believe all of life to be vain. For Job there is value and integrity in man's life and his relationship to God.

The Plowman likewise never seems convinced by Death's assertions that this life is all wretchedness and vanity. He defends the joy of

a happy marriage and family life. Although God's judgment is accepted and in the prayer he formally relinquishes his beloved wife, finally commending her soul to the care of Jesus, yet he, as an earthbound creature, does not seem fully convinced that this is the best way things could have happened. He still grieves at her loss: "Mich reuet Margaret, mein auserweltes weib" (xxxiv,69-70). But in spite of his intense grief, he manfully summons courage to affirm the deed against all his feelings of love and loyalty and his acute sense of loss:

Günne ir, genadenreicher herre!, in deiner allmechtigen und ewigen gotheit spiegel sich ewiglichen ersehen, beschauen und erfreuen, darinnen sich alle engelische kore erleuchten!

Alles, das under des ewigen fanentragers fanen gehört, es sei welicherlei creatüre es sei, helfft mir aus herzen grunde seliglich mit innigkeit sprechen: Amen! (xxxiv,70-75).

It is in this final act of acceptance and affirmation of God's sovereignty, in spite of his human feelings, that the Plowman ranks with Job as one of the most beautiful and moving treatments of man's attempt to face the absolute, ultimate reality.

The Resolutions of the Disputes

"We had a wager of sorts," said Satan. "It was some time ago. . . . Did I lose or win? The issue was obscured by discussion."

H. G. Wells, The Undying Fire⁵³

The Ackermann

In both works God appears at the end and passes judgment on the suits of the two sides. But in both cases the verdict is far from clear. The question of the outcome of the dispute between the Plowman and Death has been the subject of varying interpretations. Opinions differ on how the debate is resolved and on whether the resolution

represents orthodox, medieval views or calls such views into question. Among those who believe the conflict to be resolved in some way, most maintain that the ending is consistent with traditional medieval attitudes about death, God's nature and the world order. At least one critic, however, finds it to be decided in an entirely new and modern way. On the other side of the issue, among those who believe the conflict to be fundamentally unresolved, some find this lack of a solution to be typical of medieval thinking and unproblematical. Others believe the author to have been aware of the contradictory nature of the outcome. They see his recognition of the paradox and his attempt to come to terms with it as going beyond previously held attitudes and as evidence of the work's modern spirit.

The terms medieval and Renaissance, though themselves much in doubt, will be retained in this discussion, partly for lack of better designations and partly because they are the terms used in many of the articles to be reviewed. It is assumed, however, that no hard and fast division between the periods is meant, and that these terms are to be considered in their historical context.

Konrad Burdach and Walter Rehm, although disagreeing on who wins the debate, both see the work as more modern than those works which went before it. Both identify in the *Plowman* a representative of what they call the new humanism and find in the conflict a new spirit of self-awareness. Burdach says of the *Plowman*: "Aus ihm spricht die religiöse Weltgesinnung der jungen Renaissance: er ist im schönsten und reinsten Sinn ein Humanist."⁵⁴ Although, in Burdach's view, the *Plowman* formally loses the fight against Death, traditional medieval explanations are not sufficient to resolve the issues raised.

Walter Rehm, on the other hand, proclaims the Plowman to be the real victor in the debate, in spite of God's verdict giving the victory to Death. Rehm writes: ". . . äusserlich zwar bleibt der Tod stets der Sieger, aber innerlich besiegt und überwindet der Ackermann den Tod. . . . Der Ackermann vernichtet im Vertrauen auf den göttlichen Charakter des Lebens dessen Zerstörer und Verneiner, den Tod" (pp. 117, 136). In Rehm's view the debate provides a modern answer to the problem of death. The Plowman defeats Death, man's enemy, though his faith in Christ's victory over it. Thus life and man's newly recognized right to life triumph over death. Rehm sees in the Plowman a forerunner of Luther in breaking down the supremacy of death, sin, and hell over life.⁵⁵ Rehm seems not to be disturbed by the fact that Christ is spoken of only once in the debate, and nothing is said of His triumph over death.

Other interpreters, in contrast, rather than finding in the debate a victory for life and an answer to death, believe the conflict to be undecided. Barbara Könniker states that the work ends in an open question.⁵⁶ Ernst Cassirer claims that no answers are given, ". . . the dialogue only presents us with the oppositions themselves, not with their solutions. There is, apparently, no decision in the battle between the peasant and death."⁵⁷

The suggested lack of a resolution is regarded by some as medieval and by others as modern. Friedrich Ranke points to the late medieval tolerance for contradictions which were allowed to coexist without being resolved. Ranke speaks of "das Ja und das Nein," Günther Müller of "das Sowohl-Als auch [sic], 'des' Mittelalters . . . jenes Sichtragen der Wirklichkeit durch Gegensätze, die abstrakt gesehen unvereinbar sind."⁵⁸

Thus no definite answer to the questions would be necessary since ". . . erst wenn beide Seiten gezeigt und genau ausgewogen sind, hat man die Wahrheit; denn die Wahrheit ist der ungelöste Gegensatz" (Ranke, p. 318). Such contradictions were not viewed as questionable at the time.

Other interpreters, however, who agree that the conflict is undecided regard this lack of a resolution as problematical in the author's view and as evidence that earlier explanations were no longer satisfactory and no longer automatically accepted. They find in it a sign of the weakness of late medieval religious faith. Walter Blank explains that the debate illustrates that religious faith was no longer taken for granted, but had to be achieved through understanding as an act of the will.⁵⁹ This study supports the thesis that Tepl intended to question certain popular beliefs and that this need to examine accepted truths resembles Job's confrontation with a similar set of traditionally accepted doctrines.

Gerhard Hahn suggests that the author believed that the issues could not be solved in this life and that the author's recourse is a recognition of the awesome incomprehensibility of God.⁶⁰ Hugo Kuhn describes the conflict as not only unresolved but unresolvable.⁶¹ Spalding regards this awareness on the part of the author as a sign of the work's modernity.⁶²

On the other side of the controversy are those who view the debate and the issues as harmoniously resolved. Most believe the verdict and solution to be consistent with earlier medieval attitudes. According to Ella Schafferus, the Plowman concedes in the fight and falls back on God's mercy. He submits himself without question

"klaglos and willenlos" to God's verdict which is wise, just, and altogether satisfactory.⁶³ She, in contrast to Kuhn, stresses that there is no evidence of the deus absconditus of the Nominalists in the debate. God's power is not characterized by incomprehensibility but by mercy and justice (pp. 222-23). In her view the questionings in the Ackermann do not go beyond, and are consistent with, the view accepted in traditional church doctrine. Hübner likewise argues, "der Schiedspruch Gottes, . . . könnte nicht christlich-mittelalterlicher sein, als er ist."⁶⁴ In content the work is strictly consistent with medieval traditions. It is the form, "die neue Latinität," which is innovative (p. 384-85).

In addition to the question of how God's verdict decides the issues argued there are differences of opinion over who actually wins the debate proper. Some interpreters accept God's verdict that Death is the winner in the debate literally. Renée Brand, whose important work strongly influenced Ackermann interpretation, maintains that the sympathies of the author lie of the side of Death and are represented by Death's arguments.⁶⁵ The debate is a process of education for the Plowman who learns to accept the "Existenzberechtigung des Todes neben dem Leben" and who, in accepting the necessity of death, becomes reconciled to the divine harmony (p. 22). According to Brand's interpretation, Death's arguments and those of God are the same: "Es wird . . . deutlich, wie sehr im Grunde die Argumente Gottes und die des Todes identisch sind" (p. 43). Death convinces the Plowman that he should not grieve for his wife: "Er hat bewiesen, dass nicht nur kein Grund zur Klage und Anklage vorhanden ist, sondern nicht einmal zum Schmerz" (p. 45). Franz Bäuml agrees with Brand's bold interpretation,

giving the victory to Death on the grounds that Death succeeds in invalidating the Plowman's initial accusation.⁶⁶ Like Brand, Bäuml argues that the standpoint of the author is to be identified with that of Death (p. 118). In all of these interpretations much depends on how the Plowman reacts to Death's arguments and whether or not he is convinced by them as some suggest. The attitude expressed in the work can only be determined by an examination of the speeches of the participants and the words of the closing prayer. The following section will review the Plowman's speeches to determine whether, in fact, it can be maintained that he actually capitulates to Death in the course of the debate.

The question of the outcome of the contest necessarily leads to the question whether or not the final prayer is to be regarded as an integral part of the process and spoken by the Plowman, or as an epilogue spoken by the author. Burdach, DeBoor, Deinert, Spalding and others believe that the Plowman is speaking.⁶⁷ Brand, Weber, and Krogmann suggest that it is not the Plowman but the author speaking.⁶⁸ Hahn is uncertain, saying: "Spricht der Ackermann oder spricht der Dichter nun direkt?"⁶⁹

Let us look briefly at some of the reasons for proposing that the prayer is the Plowman's reply to God's judgment. In Tepl's letter of introduction, which accompanied the copy of the Ackermann sent to his friend Peter Rothirsch, Tepl states that the plaintiff begins the argument and becomes mollified: "arenga invehitur et demollitur."⁷⁰ Blaschka translates the passage: "der Wortführer beginnt den Streit und wird beschwichtigt."⁷¹ Heilig renders it: ". . . mit der Arenga wird Zeter geschrien und versöhnt" (p. 141). Walshe's version states

that "the spokesman inveighs and is brought to yielding."⁷² The verb demollire, [which is defined to mean "to completely soften" (völlig erweichen,⁷³)] would seem to indicate that a significant change does take place in the Plowman's outlook. But the question remains, when does this occur? During the debate or as a result of God's appearance and verdict? If it can be shown that the Plowman is not convinced by Death's arguments but rather by God's intervention and judgment in the matter, then the final prayer may possibly be viewed as spoken by the Plowman, since it does show a real change of attitude.

In the tradition of the medieval Streitgespräch it was customary that an argument be decided not by the capitulation of one side or the other in the debate, but by the verdict of an independent third party at the end. The judge was often God or a personified figure such as "reason." Only rarely did one party defeat the other before the end of the debate, and then it was usually only in the case of a contest between Christian and heathen in which the heathen would suddenly repent.⁷⁴

Indeed, it would seem important to the structure of the debate that Death does not win the contest outright, but rather that God decides it. For if Death were to refute the Plowman's arguments himself, then God's appearance and decision in the matter become superfluous. But, if the conflict is not decided, God's role becomes the decisive factor in the debate as it is in the Jobean conflict. It is inconceivable that Job would have conceded to his counselors. We will return to this question after first considering whether or not it can be maintained that Death convinces the Plowman of his case in the course of the debate proper.

Renée Brand and Franz Bäuml are the strongest advocates of the opinion that the Plowman undergoes a fundamental change during the debate. Brand believes that Death necessarily must invalidate the Plowman's arguments in order for God to pronounce Death the victor in the debate: "Damit Gott zu dem Schiedspruch gelangen kann: . . . muss der Tod die ungeheure Anklage vorher von innen entkräftet haben."⁷⁵ Bäuml too finds that Death succeeds in "invalidating the Ploughman's initial accusation and the complex of motivations upon which it was based."⁷⁶ He explains Death's victory as "his successful transformation of the Ploughman from accuser to suppliant" (p. 113).

In Brand's view the Plowman betrays a certain ambivalence about the justness of his suit from the beginning, which comes more pronounced until Death succeeds in convincing the Plowman of the necessity for his existence in the world order and the foolishness of rebellion against it.

Contrary to assertions that death is the victor in the debate, I hope to show, through an analysis of the strategies and attitudes of the opponents, that Tepl intended the debate to end in a draw. The work is constructed as a mosaic of contradictions, oppositions, and juxtapositions which reflect the author's wrestling with the meaning of death--the contradiction of life--and with death's relationship to God, who is the common denominator of both death and life. Like Job, the Plowman tries to grasp God's relationship to the evil he has experienced in the death of his wife and tries to come to terms with the contradictions he senses. How can God allow such an outrage? Why does He tolerate such an evil servant? That the work is intimately concerned with the working out of a view of God is evidenced by the

extended description and explanation of God's nature in the final prayer.

In addition to the central issue of the Plowman's opposition to Death's function and to his very existence, there are juxtapositions large and small surrounding and reflecting the central issue at every turn. They form a mosaic of small oppositions and comprise a carefully maintained equilibrium between the contestants, which survives in spite of the shifting offensives and varying approaches of the combatants.

Tepl's fondness for contrasts as a stylistic device is illustrated by the first line of his letter to Peter Rothirsch in which Tepl writes: "Grato gratus, suo suus, socio socius, Petro de Tepla Johannes de Telpa."⁷⁷ Heilig's translation preserves these oppositions: "Dem liebwerten versichert der liebwerte, dem ergebenen der ergebene, dem Genossen der Genosse, dem Peter von Tepl der Johannes von Tepl."⁷⁸ Describing his technique in composing the Ackermann Tepl emphasizes his use of contrasting elements saying:

Hier wird ein langes Thema kurz, ein kurzes lang abgehandelt, hier bilden Lob und Tadel der Dinge, ja oft eines und desselben Dinges den Inhalt. Genauer Ausdruck findet sich neben ungenauem, bald steht der gleiche Name für verschiedene Sachen, bald verschiedene Namen für die gleiche Sache."⁷⁹

He points as well to the contrasting interplay of irony and seriousness: "hier treiben auf demselben Flecke Scherz und Ernst ihr Wechselspiel."⁸⁰

To this description of his method Tepl adds playfully: "sie alle soll der aufmerksame Hörer herausfinden."⁸¹ If we are to take Tepl's hint seriously we should not be surprised to find numerous such contrasts and oppositions not only between the arguments of the opponents but within

the individual speeches themselves. The author characterizes both of his contestants as holding views which are partially wrong and partially right. The opponents openly accuse one another of placing false statements next to true ones, of mixing truth with falsehood. The Plowman charges Death six times with using just such contradictory talk, saying for example in chapter xi: "Gaukelweise treibt ir mir vor, under warheit falsch mischt ir mir ein" (3-4) and in chapter xv: "Süsse und sauer, linde und hert, gütig und scharpf pflegt ir euch zu beweisen" (2-3).

Both contestants change strategies and approaches during the controversy. First the Plowman accuses Death of trying to distract or trick him out of mourning his wife. A few speeches later we find him asking how to drive grief out of his heart. Then in his next speech he again reverses his position, crying that he will never stop grieving for his wife. Death, who is drawn into the argument by the Plowman's outraged curses and accusations, at first behaves calmly in a condescending, almost bemused manner, but soon he too becomes angry and joins the Plowman in hurling insults. During the course of the conflict he shifts from defending himself to attacking his opponent and life which the Plowman represents. The Plowman, who begins with harsh imprecations in a fierce attack on Death, is forced by Death to shift to defending himself and the value of life. In their final speeches both abruptly return to the stance held at the beginning of the debate. The combatants exchange roles, becoming alternately calm and angry, each admonishing the other to remain calm and exercise more restraint. The author juxtaposes human and inhuman perspectives, reason and emotion, practicality and idealism, stoicism and passionate involvement, as well

as praise and blame of women, marriage, the human body, and man's reason.

The author characterizes the Plowman's point of view as naive and Death's attitude as contradictory, containing elements of both the orthodox Christian and the Totentanz ways of depicting Death. It is the contradictions within, rather than between, the arguments of the opponents which reveal the inadequacies of their views. Both positions, which represent popularly accepted beliefs, are shown to be wrong and are replaced at the end by a more mature and complete concept of God and His relationship to the world order. Tepl's depiction of the naiveté of some popular thinking about death, his attempt to deal with the problem of evil as a real problem, and his unintimidated attitude toward the figure of death mark his work as going beyond previous treatments of the subject.

Chapter I

The Ackermann debate lacks the kind of scene-setting frame for which the prologue in heaven of the book of Job is the prototype. Instead it begins with the dialogue itself and, as in the book of Job, with an urgent expression of the protagonist's anguish. The Plowman's first outcry attacking Death could scarcely be framed in stronger terms: "Grimmiger vertilger aller leut, schedlicher durchechter aller werlt, freissamer mörder aller menschen, her Tot, euch sei verflucht!" (1-2). His cursing of Death, accusations that he is a terrible murderer, and demands that Death be banned from God's creation, express the Plowman's outrage and confidence in his cause. There is no evidence of any ambivalence about the justness of his suit. The ambivalence is rather of another sort. From the very first the lines

of the principal contradiction with which the Plowman has to deal are already drawn. He calls on God to join him in cursing this murderer, whom, he also acknowledges, God Himself has created. He cries: "Got, euer tirmen, hasse euch" (3). On the one hand the Plowman tries to separate Death from God and to avoid implicating God in Death's evil doings, while on the other he recognizes, but can scarcely grasp, God's ultimate responsibility in the matter. Death is called "Unverschämter bösewicht" (14), the opponent of God and creation. God, man, and all of creation are placed on one side and opposed by Death on the other. In contrast to the Plowman, it is precisely because Job recognizes his suffering to be directly overseen by God and directly related to his control of the universe that his dilemma arises.

There is in this first speech a conscious effort to create suspense. Tepl does not explain who has been murdered or the circumstances of the suit, but leaves the reader to wonder what may be the specific cause of the accuser's outrage.

Chapter II

To the Plowman's wildly agitated state of mind Tepl juxtaposes the cool, composed bearing of Death who answers in a bemused, somewhat sarcastic manner: "Höret, höret, höret neue wunder! Grausame und ungehorte teidinge fechten uns an" (1-2). He is an avuncular, almost fatherly figure who reacts in a calm, amicable fashion, calling his opponent "son" and asking what is wrong: "Dannoch, sun, wer du bist, so melde dich und lautmere, was dir leides von uns widerfaren sei" (4-6). Death is proud of his office and cautions the Plowman not to be over hasty in judging him. He is supremely confident of the rightness of

his actions and seems surprised at the Plowman's complaint. His restraint at this point contrasts sharply with his later agitation. While he here counsels temperance, later it is the Plowman who does so, reversing the present roles.

Chapter III

Now the plaintiff introduces himself, not directly, but by means of a riddle: "Ich bins genant ein ackerman, von vogelwat ist mein pflug" (1). He continues the riddle, giving the reason for his complaint: "Gehessig, widerwertig und widerstrebend sol ich euch immer wesen: wann ir habt mir den zwelften buchstaben, meiner freuden hort, aus dem alphabet gar freissamlich enzücket" (2-5). The Plowman does not come straight out with the information that it is his wife whom Death has taken, but supplies a few more pieces to the puzzle by referring to her as "meine lichte sumerblumen, meiner wünnen nar, . . . mein auserwelte turteltauben, meiner selten haft" (5-7).

After berating Death in his opening speech as the cause of universal misery, he begins to curse Death as the cause of his personal misery, contrasting in the sharpest terms his former happiness and his present wretchedness. In typically contradictory fashion the Plowman demands restitution for a loss which, he repeatedly asserts, cannot ever be made good. It is not really compensation for what he has lost that he wishes, however, but revenge or at least understanding of this evil.

Brand's assertion that the Plowman has doubts about his case from the start is based on his comment to Death: "Weget es selber, ob ich icht billich zürne, wüte und klage" (8-9). Brand calls it "ein,

wenn, auch verdeckter, Zweifel an der Gerechtigkeit der eigenen Sache."⁸²

One may, however, question whether asking his opponent to consider if he has just reason to lament necessarily indicates doubt. Or whether it might not instead be interpreted as evidence of how certain the Plowman is of his position, particularly in view of his other unequivocal assertions that he is in the right and his appeals to God to restore this right. Job too questions his friends rhetorically whether he is not correct. But the question is an expression of his certainty about his integrity and an attempt to convince his opponents of his case (24:25). The ambivalence Brand detects is not about the justness of his suit, of which he is perfectly confident, but about God's role in allowing this outrage.

Chapter IV

Death again takes up the motif of the riddle which the Plowman began and names the city in which Margaret lived:

in einer festen hübschen stat auf einem berg werlich
gelegen; der haben vier buchstaben: der achzehend, der
erst, der drit und der drei und zweinzigist in dem
alphabet einen namen geflochten. Da haben wir mit
einer erbern seligen tochter unser genade gewürket; ir
buchstabe was der zwelfte.

(5-9)

Ironically, we learn more objectively about the Plowman's wife from Death than we do from the Plowman himself. It is Death who tells us the name of the city in which she lived and the exact date of her death. Death's attitude thus far is generous; he praises Margaret's exceptional virtue in a manner similar to God's praise of Job in the prologue. Like Job, she was a blameless and upright person--from the Plowman's point of view a clear case of virtue unrewarded.

Death again stresses the unusualness of this attack on him: "Wunder nimt mich solicher ungehorter anfechtung, die uns nie mer hat begegnet" (1-2). Although, as mentioned earlier, cursing of death was not unusual, the author here himself acknowledges that the audacity and violence of the Plowman's attack are something exceptional in traditional laments over death.

Chapter V

The Plowman, now more downcast than ever, recapitulates in wide ranging variations the magnitude of his loss. He calls his wife: ". . . mein frideschildt für ungemach; . . . mein warsagende wünschelrute! . . . mein lichter stern an dem himel, . . . meines heiles sunne: . . . mein lichtbrehender morgenstern, . . . mein herter, steter diemant . . . mein rechte fürender leitstab . . . meines heiles verneuendem jungbrunnen." At this point his mood has not progressed beyond a distraught expression of anger and despair. He seems to be marking time in his thoughts. Blindly he returns to cursing Death in the strongest of terms and again calls on God to destroy evil Death.

The first actual turning point in the Plowman's attitude, claimed by Brand, occurs in this chapter with the Plowman's use of the words "Ja, herre, ich was ir friedel . . ." in his answer to Death's question about the identity of his wife. This response is regarded by Brand as the first turn toward moderation: "den ersten Wendepunkt von der wütenden Anklage zur Selbstbesinnung und zur Mässigung dem Tod gegenüber."⁸³

It is true that the phrase "Ja, herre," is more polite than the epithets the Plowman has previously addressed to Death. But it actually

represents little more than an acknowledgment of Death's power, which the Plowman has recognized from the beginning, and not a real change of heart, since the Plowman immediately returns to his cry of "Zeter! Wafen!" (11) and curses Death as harshly as ever: "Lastermeiliger, schandengiriger, werdenloser und grisgramiger geselle, sterbet und in der helle erstinket! Got beraube euch euer macht und lasse euch zu pulver zerstieben!" (17-20). Bäuml, who agrees with Brand in most points, does not cite this as a turning point.

Chapter VI

Death now begins to actively defend himself, attempting to prove the justice of his actions. He resorts to sarcasm and insults the Plowman for the first time, calling him "knecht" and "von Poppenfels." He presents in its first variation the argument which he uses over and over again to justify his function, the claim of his impartiality and universality. In Death's terms impartiality equals justice. He is proud of the fact that there are no exceptions, extenuating circumstances, or special cases: ". . . niemand's adels schonen, grosser kunst nicht achten, keinerlei schöne nicht ansehen, gabe, liebe, leit, alter, jugent und allerlei sachen nicht wegen wir" (7-9).

Death is pleased with his office. He arrogantly stresses his superiority even over the Pope. Trying to intimidate the Plowman, Death emphasizes the hopelessness of the Plowman's situation against his office before which even kings and popes tremble.

Chapter VII

The Plowman counters with the assertion that, however correct Death may feel in his actions, he, the Plowman, too is justified in

bringing his complaint. He bases this justification on his human nature. Indeed he would not be human if he did not mourn his loss: ". . . un menschlichen tete ich, wo ich solich löbliche gabe, die niemand dann got allein geben mag, nicht beweinet" (4-5). Here Tepl introduces another of the oppositions which contribute to the dynamics of the debate--the contrast between human and inhuman perspectives. The Plowman obeys the dictates of his human nature, an impulse which inhuman and pitiless Death cannot understand. Like the Plowman, Job feels justified in complaining since he views his human condition as a direct result of God's interest in man as his creator and the relationship of mutual responsibility for integrity which exists between them. The Plowman's idea of what it means to be human is also based on his concept of man's relationship to God as the beloved creature of a loving creator. He thinks of his wife as God's gift to him. How could God have destroyed her? Here the paradox of God's nature as creator and destroyer, which plagues both Job and the Plowman, is hinted at for the first time.

In this chapter Brand points to the Plowman's use of the words "Billichen klage ich" and "herre Tot, ir wisset es selber" again as evidence of the Plowman's ambivalence: "einerseits Anklage und nebenherlaufend die Rückfrage: Habe ich wirklich recht?"⁸⁴ This is interpreted as an attempt on the part of the Plowman at conciliation or at least to convince Death amicably:

Hier hingegen wendet sich der Kläger an den Angeklagten und will ihn gütlich überzeugen. Dieser Appell an das Mitgefühl des Todes ist als eine Geste der Vermittlung, als ein unmissverständlicher Hinweis auf eine sich langsam anbahnende Verständigung auszulegen (p. 26).

The tone of the rest of the chapter, however, far outweighs any hints at an amicable understanding. The Plowman vows: "Ich wil keren von

euch, von euch nichts gutes sagen, mit allem meinem vermügen wil ich euch ewiglich widerstreben" (14-16).

Brand is correct in pointing out that the Plowman at times seems to adopt a conciliatory tone in arguing with Death. But it is possible to read too much into these swings of attitude which are usually followed by a swing in the opposite direction and renewed opposition. They reflect a tendency of the plaintiff to try out different poses and approaches in his argumentation, rather than a consistent trend toward mollification. Just as the author enjoys adopting and mimicking different prose styles, he also relishes the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas and attitudes. He attempts to make the contest more dramatic by introducing a certain give and take between the opponents, who alternately attack each other and are forced to defend their positions.

Chapter VIII

Death's response is still dispassionate, cool, and logical in keeping with the lack of human feelings which he exemplifies. He calls on the Plowman to be reasonable, emphasizing that God has created his office for the reason of controlling overpopulation and maintaining order. He coldly pictures himself as a necessary evil. If it were not for him every living thing would devour the other. He seems to ignore the fact that living things do continually devour each other and Death does not prevent that evil.

Chapter IX

To Death's detached and logical argument the author juxtaposes the Plowman's first person perspective. Death's explanation that he is necessary to prevent overpopulation is totally ignored by the Plowman

who continues to lament more than ever. His thoughts do not escape from his first person point of view: "Unwiderbringlichen mein höchsten hort han ich verloren. . . . *Traurig und jamerig muss ich biß auf mein ende harren. . . . Enteigent habt ir mich. . . . Micheler eren het ich" (1,2-3,4-5,6). Whereas Death introduces various lines of thought in regard to the fact of the woman's death, the Plowman keeps coming back to the same point, repeating over and over what he has said before. Death's arguments merely seem to bounce off, failing to penetrate behind the Plowman's wall of grief. It is the very unresponsiveness of the Plowman, his refusal to listen and respond to Death's arguments, which the author uses to draw Death further and further into the argument, causing him to become more and more angry and insulting his opponent in ever stronger terms.

The Plowman again emphasizes Death's lack of a human perspective, attacking him with the comment that Death has never known the joy of an excellent mate: "Was weiss davon ein tummer man, der aus disem jungbrunnen nie hat getrunken?" (20-21). The Plowman praises the merits of possessing a worthy spouse and speaks here, as nowhere else in the debate, directly to the reader, saying: "Freue dich, ersamer man, reines weibes, freue dich, reines weib, ersames mannes! Got gebe euch beiden freude!" (18-20). With this the Plowman includes the reader on his side. This would seem to argue against the assertion that the author identifies with Death, since at no time does Death speak directly to the reader in the way that the Plowman does.

God should appreciate the Plowman's plight since it was He who gave the Plowman the gift of his wife. God certainly could not have taken it away. There was no reason to. On the contrary, God must

surely be outraged by this theft. The Plowman calls on God to hate Death, destroyer of good marriages: "Euch, böser Tot, aller leut feint, sei Got ewiglich gehessig!" (24). This chapter appears to pose a puzzling contradiction to God's reprimand in chapter xxxiii accusing the Plowman of failing to recognize that the Plowman's wife belonged not to him but to God. That accusation is contradicted here by the Plowman's clear acknowledgment that she was God's gift: "Allein mir twenglich herzenleit ist geschehen, dannoch danke ich got inniglich, das ich die unverruckten tochter han erkant" (21-23). It is, however, not the lack of gratitude but primarily the naivete of the Plowman's view of God, seeing only the one aspect of His role, which is in error. Job in contrast, states: "[T]he Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" (1:20).

There is nothing in chapter ix to indicate that the Plowman is being softened by Death's arguments. The reverse is, in fact, more nearly true. The Plowman renews his demands for revenge: "Der milte got, der mechtige herre, gereche mich an euch, arger traurenmacher!" (3-4).

Chapter X

While Death may not have drunk of the fountain of human experience, as the Plowman claims, his opponent certainly hasn't drunk of the fountain of wisdom. Death, gradually becoming more and more annoyed, insults the Plowman, calling him an ignorant puppy: "Du hast nicht aus der weisheit brunnen getrunken: das brüf ich an deinen worten wol. In der natur würken hastu nicht gesehen . . . ein unverstendig welf bistu!" (1-4). Nevertheless Death continues to try new arguments, hoping to get a response to his line of reasoning from the Plowman.

Instead of his impartiality he now emphasizes his universality. He attempts to minimize the Plowman's cause for complaint by showing that even the most immovable rocks, lofty trees, mighty lions, powerful champions, great and learned men are subject to the laws of mutability and death. All are changed from being to non-being. Such is the law of the earth. Why should his wife be an exception? Greater beings than she must perish.

The argument of universality and necessity does little to assuage the Plowman's grief. Rather, as for Job, the pervasiveness of evil only makes God's government of the world order more suspect.

Death now tries to intimidate the Plowman, reminding him that even he will not escape: "Du selber wirst uns nicht entweichen" (17-18).

Chapter XI

The Plowman is not intimidated by Death's grim reminder. He reacts without fear, confident that God will protect and avenge him: "Got, der mein und euer gewaltig ist, getraue ich wol, er werde mich vor euch beschirmen und umb die vor gewürkten übeltat, die ir an mir habt begangen, strenglich an euch gerechen" (1-3). He seems unaware of the contradictory implications of his own words. On the one hand he asserts that God was his excellent wife's protector and showed mercy to him for her sake, but he does not question why God allowed Death to take her if He is in control. Rather than facing the question he reverts to intoning his wife's virtues. Whereas in the two previous speeches the Plowman described her good character, noble birth, and the regard in which she was held by the community, this time

he remembers the way she cared for him.

Two contrasting approaches which we see in the Plowman's behavior are his present accusation that Death is trying to make him forget his grief which he holds to be a point of honor, and his later request for advice on how to forget his sorrow (ch. xxi). That advice is subsequently rejected (ch. xxiii) and the Plowman swears again never to let go of his wife's memory but to keep it as his guiding principle. His ultimate decision to relinquish his claim to her and to affirm the state she is now in, comes only at the very last, after God's verdict.

Both Brand and Bäuml view this chapter as representing a new phase in the argument, a reversal of the Plowman's original attacking position and a transition to a defensive stance in which he stresses his right to grieve. To say, however, that from this point on the transition from offense to defense is maintained, is contradicted by the fact that two speeches later the Plowman makes his most explicit attack on Death, directly demanding his destruction.

In this chapter (xi) the Plowman expresses how little convinced he is by Death's arguments, accusing him of contradictory and deceptive doubletalk: "Gaukelweise treibt ir mir vor, under warheit falsch mischt ir mir ein" (3-4). He voices his confidence that God will vindicate him and again ends with inflammatory cursing: "Ach, ach, ach! unverschamter mörder, her Tot, böser lasterbalg!" (22). Such name calling and the fearless assertion that God will protect him are further evidence of the vastly different attitude from such earlier dialogs with Death as the Dialogus Mortis cum Homine and the Legende von der Todes-Vision des Magister Polycarp which typically address Death with fear and trembling.

Chapter XII

Seeing that his argument of universality will not distract the Plowman from thoughts of his wife, Death tries to divert him with thoughts of finding another wife, but admonishes him this time not to love too dearly; for the more one loves the more one suffers. At this point Death offers his first piece of advice, albeit unsolicited. The advice is typical of his coldly practical point of view. Death deduces logically that the Plowman either found his first wife virtuous or he made her so. Therefore he can either search out another good woman or train one. His emphasis throughout is on man's present situation, given the fact of death. What does one do since everything that is artful, noble, honorable, brave, and worthy is bound to be destroyed anyway? His advice is stoical, but his attitude borders on the nihilistic in its stress on the destruction of all things animate and inanimate.

Death offers more advice. The Plowman should have avoided love in the first place. Even how he can minimize his pain by simply deciding to abstain from such emotions as joy and grief. Here the author introduces another important opposition--the conflict between apathy (the Greek apatheia) and involvement, the choice between tranquility or equanimity on the one hand and joy alternating with pain on the other.

That Death is patently wrong in his counsel that love is to be avoided is shown by God's acknowledgment in the verdict that the Plowman's suffering (leit) is a worthy cause for the conflict. It is the Plowman's sorrow which provokes the contest and Death is forced to speak the truth as a result.

The adage that love and sorrow are inevitably related was a commonplace of medieval literature. The more one loves, the more one suffers. Suffering was accepted as the price to be paid for the joys of love. In a courtly society in which minne and minnedienst were an essential part of the practice of knighthood, knowledge of the hazards of love did not lead to the conclusion that one should avoid love. On the contrary, the aspirant was thought to be ennobled by his suffering. The sign of great love was great sorrow. Oswald says: "Ich sprich es wol auf meinen aid, / ie grösser lieb, ie merer laid / kompt von den schönen frauen" (9:39-41).⁸⁵ Veldeke proclaims "dî minne maket reinen mût" (62,2).⁸⁶ The implication is that, although such pain can be avoided, the lover, knowing the cost, is elevated and refined by his suffering in the service of love, a sentiment which the Plowman himself later voices.

Chapter XIII

Again Death has failed to draw the Plowman's attention away from the central fact of his loss. The length of the Plowman's persistence in repeating his lament in all its variations shows the depth of his grief. It is here particularly poignant and effectively depicted through Tepl's piling up of assonances to express the excruciating sense of loss: "Ellende, allein und leides vol beleibe ich" (14). Death does not succeed in drawing the Plowman's attention onto a different line of thought until chapter xv.

The Plowman regards the suggestion that he find a new mate but avoid love as absurd and impossible. It seems to him an impracticable philosophical argument. The Plowman opposes philosophizing with

common sense, dry logic with bitter experience. He states that he has not studied under esoteric and clever teachers as Death apparently has. On the contrary, he knows only one thing--and this very clearly--his pain and its source. Death may theorize, but, not having experienced either such love or such grief, he is not qualified to judge it or to make prescriptions. Death is an unfeeling destroyer of marriages and families, one who leaves children orphaned. Can that be intelligent?

In this chapter the proposed transformation from attacker to supplicant is not advanced. The Plowman aggressively continues to insult Death and sarcastically suggests that no one could expect restitution from such a dishonorable character: "Wie ist dem, her Tot, aller leut eren brecher? An euch kan niemant ichts gutes verdienen noch finden; nach untat wellet ir niemant genug tun; niemant wellet ir ergetzen" (17-18).

The Plowman shows little sign of weakening or of being convinced that Death was justified in taking his wife. Instead he issues an ironic curse: "Solliche guttet, . . . solliche genade, . . . solichen lon, so ir den leuten gebt; solich ende, so ir den leuten tut--schicke euch, der des todes und lebens gewaltig sei!" (20-24). This represents a sarcastic rejection of Death's reference to taking the Plowman's wife as an act of favor, which he calls "unser genade" (iv,8-9). The Plowman again ends by calling on God to avenge him on the "erzschalk Tot!" (27).

The Plowman's confusion is again apparent. Although he has previously said that God is not the cause of his suffering, he indirectly implicates Him with the words: "als lang got wil, muss ich es von euch leiden" (3-4) and at the same time calls on God to punish Death.

Chapter XIV

Death answers with restraint that such angry talk is likely to arouse his enmity but continues to exercise control. He now takes up the Plowman's challenge, taking seriously the statement that he should receive just such justice as he gives. He proceeds to defend his actions with an abrupt about-face in tactics. He turns the tables on the Plowman, admitting that he did the deed, but reversing the Plowman's argument by denying that it was an evil deed. He contradicts the basic premise of the Plowman's suit, arguing that what he did was actually good and trying to show the Plowman that his wife's fate was not an evil. He quotes the authority of "the philosophers" who say that the best time to die is when one most desires to live: "Das haben gelobt, das haben begert die philosophen, wann sie sprechen, am besten zu sterben, wann am besten liebet zu leben. Er ist nicht wol gestorben, der ~~der~~ sterben hat begert; ee hat zu lange gelebt, wer uns umb sterben hat angeruft" (9-13).

Having allowed himself to become angry, Death regains his composure and, in this chapter assumes the role of a magnanimous benefactor. In keeping with his affirmation of the goodness of his function, he graciously concedes--in spite of some slight irritation at the Plowman's behavior--that the Plowman's soul shall join that of his wife in the blessings of the hereafter. Death is able to exercise such restraint and even generosity because he is supremely confident of his power: "Als wenig du kanst der sunnen ir licht, . . . als wenig magstu uns unser macht berauben!" (25-28). While it is Death who here sets himself up as an example of tolerant behavior for the Plowman, the attentive reader will note that the Plowman in a later

chapter plays this same role to contrast with Death's angry outbursts.

As earlier in the debate, Death is the one who gives us the objective information about the Plowman's wife. In this speech he reveals the exact year of her death as calculated in two ways.

It is perhaps this unexpected pose of magnanimity which finally causes the Plowman in his next speech for the first time to cease marking time in his thoughts and to begin to rationally consider Death's nature. Death's assertion that he is a good presents a puzzling new facet to the Plowman's picture of his opponent. It represents the high point of Death's conciliatory overtures.

Chapter XV

Representing as it does the approximate middle of the Plowman's speeches in the debate, chapter xv is held by some to be a pivotal chapter in the progress of the argument. Bäuml states:

Chapter xv marks a turning point in the relationship of the two disputants: the motif 'accusation' which forms the basis of the development of the dispute through chapter xv loses its significance as principal impetus to the development of the second half of the dispute. The relationship that emerges is no longer that of accuser and accused, but rather one of mentor and suppliant for advice.⁸⁷

It is true that this chapter marks a new phase in the debate. The Plowman now finally breaks away from the variations on the theme of his lament with which he has concerned himself and begins to argue systematically with his opponent and to critically examine the relationship between Death and God. Instead of a repetition of the cursing and expressions of grief of the earlier chapters, the Plowman for the first time questions his opponent directly. It is not,

however, done in an attitude of supplication, but is a challenge to Death to explain who he is that he has the right to take the Plowman's wife: "Darumb weste ich geren, wer ir weret, was ir weret, wo ir weret, von wann ir weret und warzu ir tüchtig weret, das ir also vil gewaltes habet und on entsagen mich also übel gefodert" (10-13).

The Plowman accuses Death of trying to deceive him with contradictory talk making reference to the devious juxtapositions in Death's arguments: "Süsse und sauer, linde und hert, gütig und scharpf pflegt ir euch zu beweisen, den, die ir meint zu betreiben" (2-4). If this chapter represents a change from accuser to suppliant, it seems peculiar that here we also have one of the Plowman's strongest indictments of his opponent since the opening, his direct demand that God destroy Death who is His enemy and subverts the order of His creation: "Gib, herre, plage, tu *verkürzung, leg an klemmnüss und vertilge den greulichen Tot, der dein und aller unser feint ist!" (16-18). This would hardly seem to be a step toward acceptance of Death's necessary role in God's world order. On the contrary, this chapter, along with chapters i, xxi, and xxxi, contains the Plowman's strongest indictment and rejection of Death.

However much Death may seek to excuse his action by calling it good, the Plowman does not accept the explanation. He knows that he personally has experienced a terrible event. The argument now turns to the question of the source of this evil. The Plowman identifies two possible sources--God and Death. Although he refuses to attribute any responsibility to God for it, he recognizes that God's relationship to the problem has to be defined. His reason for excluding God from blame is the very unfairness of his wife's early death. Unlike

Job, he cannot attribute this injustice to God. According to his thinking, his wife was of such spotless virtue that she could only have been stricken because of someone else's sins--the Plowman's. God could not be responsible for this, because He would either have punished the evildoer himself--not the innocent party--or would have forgiven him: "So bin ich von got nicht also geplaget: wann hette ich *mich *verwürket gen got--als leider oft geschehen ist--das hett er an mir gerochen oder es hette mir widerbracht die Wandelson. Ir seit der Übelteter!" (7-10). Because, as a rule, deaths are obviously unrelated to the virtue of the victims, God cannot be responsible. Again the Plowman is confused in expecting there to be a link between virtue and long life. If death were caused by an individual's specific lack of virtue his wife might never die. Death is caused by original sin, but the mechanism of random choice by which it functions is mysterious. The Plowman's confusion points up the problem, about which Job also agonizes--the inequity in the fates of the good and the wicked. Whereas Death emphasizes the fairness of the inescapability of death for all classes of men, the Plowman stresses the reverse situation--the case of the early deaths of the virtuous. Both are aspects of the enigmatic impartial workings of nature and the problematic lack of overlap between the natural and the moral orders. The Plowman believes that the two must intersect at some point if God is truly in control of the creation.

The questions which result from the assertion that Death alone is the evil one recall the ancient dilemma of the source of evil in the world. They raise the spectre of ^aseparate origin for evil reminiscent of the

Manichean heresy. The Plowman wants to know what death is, where he comes from, the source of his power and the reason for his existence. Earlier thinkers, in particular Augustine who combatted the Manichean heresy, dealt with the problem of evil by denying its existence. Tepl's Plowman, however, acknowledges certain injustices which seem to contradict the essential harmony of God's world order. He grapples with the problem of how to reconcile the reality of the evil he has experienced in the death of his wife with the definition of God as all-good. The Plowman realizes at the end what Job realized at the beginning, that the problem of evil is really the problem of God, and, like Job, achieves a new and expanded view of God's nature.

Chapter XVI

In response to the Plowman's questions about his nature, Death expresses a sincere desire to explain himself, to substantiate his legitimacy and prove that he has been unjustly accused. In this chapter Death again insists that he is not evil but good. He calls the Plowman's complete misunderstanding of it ignorance. The Plowman's opinion of him is exactly the reverse of the truth. Death's comment underscores the contradictoriness of the issue: "Was böse ist, das nennen gut, und was gut ist, das heissen böse sinnlose leute; dem geleich tustu auch" (1-2). The question is not one of fine distinctions but of totally opposite interpretations. Is Death a great evil or an actual good? The oppositions which Death uses in this speech to describe himself further underline the confusing contradictions in his nature. Many of these oppositions are expressed as riddles. Death says he is something and yet nothing, an end and a beginning, everywhere and nowhere.

To support his argument that he is actually a good, Death states that he is God's tool, a scythe which cuts straight. His confusion seems to be in thinking that justice involves nothing more than sheer, random chance selection: "Unser sengse geet fur sich: . . . Sihe, das ist rechtfertigkeit!" (5-9).

Tepl juxtaposes the origins of the two opponents. Death's origin, like man's, is in paradise where he was created by God. Death conveniently does not mention original sin in this connection except euphemistically as "verboten speise" (32). Proudly he argues that, on balance, he does the world more good than harm. He directly contradicts his opponent's basic premise by asserting that the Plowman, far from lamenting, should actually be thanking him for what he has done: "Lass dich begnügen! und danke uns, das dir von uns so gütlich ist geschehen!" (36-38). The argument now has been turned completely around.

Death's view of his function is as slanted as the Plowman's view of God. Although Death claims to be God's tool, his statements actually emphasize his own arbitrariness, his own judgment more than God's judgment. He glories in his unassailable power and in the fact that even giants must fall before him: "Die grossen heunen *mussten vor uns fallen" (16-17). In the picture on the wall of a Roman temple he defeats all opponents: "bestreit der Tot und begrub sie alle!" (26-27). He calls himself "herre und auch gewaltiger auf erden, in dem luft und meres streum" (34-35). His attitude is vainglorious revelling in the office with which he has been entrusted.

Chapter XVII

Instead of merely expressing outrage as he has done before, the Plowman now responds with reasoned arguments and vigorous sarcasm.

Unconvinced by Death's complete reversal of the interpretation of his function, he counters with a similar trick, calling Death an old, experienced, widely travelled man, but then he slyly turns this description around to insinuate that Death is an experienced, old liar: "Alter man neue mere, gelerter man unbekante mere, . . . Wann ir nu auch ein solicher alter man seit, so mügt ir wol tichten" (1-5). He now begins to argue systematically, contradicting Death on specific points. First he objects to Death's assertion that he is impartial and cuts straight with his scythe. The Plowman accuses him of cutting selectively, saying: ". . . jedoch hauet euer sengse uneben" (6). He points to the thistles, weeds, and wicked people which abound, in contrast to the paltry number of good flowers, herbs, and decent people with which he contrasts them. The Plowman's bias on this point is evident, as well as his confusion in arguing both for impartiality and for partiality (favoring the virtuous).

The Plowman next attacks Death's declaration that he does the world more good than harm. He contradicts Death by using one of the most popular themes of medieval and ancient writings on death, the ubi sunt theme. It is the typical complaint of every age: Where are the great people who lived in times past?:

. . . wo sint die frumen, achtbern leute, als vor zeiten waren? Ich wene, ir habt sie alle hin, mit in ist auch lieb, die useln sint och überbeliben. Wo sint sie hin, die auf erden wonten, die mit gote redeten, an im genade, hulde, auch reichthum erworben? Wo sint sie hin, die auf erden sassen under dem gestirne, umbgiengen und entschieden die planeten? Wo sint sie hin, die sinnereichen, die meisterlichen, die gerechten, die frütigen leute, von den die kroniken so vil sagen? Ir habt sie alle und meine schöne und zarte ermort; die snöden sind noch alda. (11-20)

He cleverly turns this common complaint, that things are not as they used to be, against Death and makes Death responsible for the evil state of things in the world. It is precisely Death's unfair choices, his practice of cutting down the most worthy people and leaving the wicked ones which has brought on the sorry state of the times, the general decline of society and culture. To further support his argument the Plowman cites the case of the two armies, which he witnessed in battle, as evidence that Death is not impartial: "In dem here etelich totet ir, etelich liesset ir leben. Mer knecht dann herren sach ich tot ligen" (27-28). He concludes that, since Death is obviously lying about his impartiality, he is probably also lying about his origin in paradise. This shows little inclination to accept Death's arguments.

Walshe suggests that in actively opposing Death's arguments, the Plowman has risen above a personal view.⁸⁸ Brand too cites as an important sign of the Plowman's changing attitude, his recognition that the injustice of Death is a universal human problem and not simply his own individual one. Brand sees this as a weakening of his position since "Die Stärke der Position des Ackermanns lag in seinem Beharren auf der Ebene des Persönlichen." To view things from Death's universal point of view makes the Plowman's position "von innen her unhaltbar."⁸⁹

Yet in another sense the recognition that Death affects people in general unfairly, as in the case of the two armies, might also be regarded as a strengthening of the Plowman's position in the same way that it is in the book of Job. Job too is led by his own experience to reflect on the fate of others and becomes acutely aware of the injustices suffered by them. His argument is reinforced by the fact

that it is not merely he alone who is being punished unfairly, but that the world at large seems to be out of joint. If Job were the only one, perhaps there could be a mistake or a misunderstanding, but it is the very fact that so many good people suffer unjustly, while wicked people prosper, that threatens his faith in God's justice. His own experience is merely the impetus to the realization that something is radically wrong in the world. The fact that death happens to everyone universally, and not simply to one individual, is not a justification for it. Universality is not an answer to the problems of suffering and death.

Far from being conciliatory, the Plowman makes a sarcastic attack on his opponent in this chapter which serves to throw more wood on the fire and provokes in turn Death's caustic assault in chapter xviii. After rejecting Death's arrogant, though apparently well meant, attempt at an explanation of his nature and origin, the Plowman offends him by ironically commenting: "Ist das rechte gemeet? Ist das rechte gericht? Geet so euer sengse hau für sich? Wol her, lieben Kinder, alle wol her! reiten wir engegen, enbieten und sagen wir lob und ere dem Tot, der also rechte richtet! Gotes gerichte ist kaum also gerecht" (29-33). Death retaliates angrily in chapter xviii with a satirical discourse of his own on the Plowman's wisdom or lack of it: "Hetten wir dich vor bekant, wir hetten dir gefolget; wir hetten dich, dein weib und alle leut ewig lassen leben. Das hetten wir dir allein zu eren getan, wann du bist zumale ein kluger esel!" (28-31). The Plowman in provoking Death is still on the attack.

Chapter XVIII

That Death is stung by the Plowman's biting sarcasm is shown by his equally venomous reaction and the ad hominem argument to which he resorts in this chapter. He prefaces this, however, with what appears at first to be a move toward conciliation, explaining that he has behaved wrongly toward his opponent whom he has seriously underrated. Then he proceeds to praise his opponent in ironic, exaggerated fashion, comparing him with mock respect to famous figures of the past, men such as the Plowman has just lamented in his ubi sunt speech. The barb is two-pronged in that some or all of the figures he cites are only distinguished by their folly. Thus Death compares the Plowman to some truly great fools with whom even he cannot compete. Death shows these men's deeds, and later all of man's collective wisdom, to be nothing but foolishness and vanity.

Due to the obscurity of many of the references, critics are divided on whether Death intends to mock all or only some of the figures he cites.⁹⁰ Walshe suggests that the author juxtaposes both types to contrast greatness with folly.⁹¹ The oxymoron with which Death ends his speech, calling his opponent a "kluger esel," corresponds to his approach to the chapter as a whole, the juxtaposition of examples of cleverness and foolishness. It is characteristic of Death's penchant for the "contradictory talk" about which the Plowman often complains, Death's mixing of statements that are "süss und sauer, falsch und richtig."

Chapter XIX

Both Brand and Bäuml agree that the Plowman's transformation to suppliant, which began in chapter v, is fully accomplished in this

chapter. Brand writes: "Damit ist die Wandlung des Anklagenden in den um Rat und Hilfe Bittenden endgültig und sichtbar vollzogen."⁹² Bäuml concurs, saying, "Here, however, the Ploughman assumes, for the first time in such completeness, the role of suppliant."⁹³

At this point it must be asked what is meant by the term suppliant and whether this is the proper term to describe the Plowman's state of mind. Generally, one would define a suppliant as someone who makes a request with humble demeanor. The Plowman, however, does not approach Death with a humble attitude in this chapter. With his sarcastic attack Death has come down off his pedestal. The Plowman has drawn him out. He is no longer the avuncular figure of the early speeches but a vicious opponent. In contrast the Plowman now assumes the opposite role. Having gotten Death to lose patience, he sets himself up as an example of restraint and admonishes his opponent that he is behaving badly. He speaks to Death not humbly, but rather high-handedly, saying: "Take me as an example:" "Nemet beispild bei mir! Wie zu kurz, wie zu lang, wie ungütlich, wie unrechte ir an mir habt gefahren, dannoch gedulde ich, geriche es nicht, als ich zu rechte sollte: noch heute wil ich der besser sein" (9-12).

The Plowman's absurd threat of personal revenge on Death amounts to the ant threatening the elephant. It is an audacious, even comical, bluff. The Plowman asks Death to acknowledge his opponent's moderation and forbearance, challenges him to prove that he, the Plowman, has been unfair or has spoken in an unseemly fashion: "Han ich icht ungleichs oder unhübsch gegen euch gebaret, des underweiset mich: ich wil sein gernwilliglich widerkomen" (12-13). Can Death have forgotten his violent curses of the opening speech? He appeals to Death's better

nature, hoping to get him to admit his injustice and to confirm what the Plowman perceives in the world order.

The request that he makes of Death is not an entreaty but an ultimatum followed by a threat. He demands restitution for his loss, not as an inferior from a superior, but mindful of what he is firmly convinced to be his legal right to restitution. Death must either make good the loss he has caused, show the Plowman how to make it good himself, or come with him before God:

. . . so ergetzet mich meines schadens oder underweiset mich, wie ich widerkome meines grossen herzenleides. Werlich, so zu kurz geschah nie manne! . . . Entweder ir widerbringet, was ir an meiner traurenwenderin, an mir und meinen kinden arges habt begangen, oder komet des mit an got" (14-19).

Again he emphasizes his right to restitution: ". . . ich getrauet euch wol, ir würdet euer gerechtigkeit selbs erkennen, darnach mir genügen tun nach grosser untat (21-22). He closes with the threat: "Anders es müsste der hamer den amboss treffen, herte wider herte wesen, es kome warzu es kome!" (23-24).

The most critical word here for the interpretation that the Plowman capitulates is the word widerkomen which Brand construes to mean that the Plowman must "overcome" his heartache. It is true that the Plowman later asks advice on how to rid himself of his grief, but in the context in which the word widerkomen is used in this chapter, it seems at least equally likely that it means "to make good" a loss. In line 13 above this is clearly its meaning: "Han ich icht ungleichs . . . gegen euch gebaret, des underweiset mich: ich wil sein gernwilliglich widerkomen" (12-13). The second use of widerkomen is followed by another allusion to restitution in the words genügen tun (22).

Situated between these two references, it seems not unlikely that the term denotes the same idea.

In fact, although Walshe interprets it as signifying "to overcome" and Spalding as "to recover," other critics opt for the other interpretation as meaning "to make good" a loss.⁹⁴ Burdach states that the suggestion of two different meanings of the word is to be doubted.⁹⁵ Krogmann interprets widerkomen in the first instance to mean "Ersatz leisten" and in the second to mean "Ersatz bekommen."⁹⁶ And Feliz Genzmer renders it as "Vergütung erlangen."⁹⁷ Thus it is far from certain whether or not the Plowman is entreating Death for aid or demanding what is his right.

Aside from this one phrase, there is no other indication that the Plowman is asking for anything but what he believes is due him. The fact that the Plowman here for the first time mentions bringing the matter before God, shows his continued confidence that he is legally in the right: ". . . oder komet des mit mir an got, der da ist mein, euer und aller welt rechter richter" (18-20).

It is a matter of conjecture whether asking for advice, which the Plowman later does, necessarily implies a change from attacker to suppliant and whether this constitutes a capitulation in the argument.

Chapter XX

Death quickly recovers his balance and responds to the Plowman's new tone with approval, claiming that this is what he wanted to see in his opponent all along. He proceeds to counsel a stoic acceptance of the unavoidable fact of death and bereavement. He advises that death is not something which one should lament, but is the natural course of

things, the appropriate compliment to the beginning: "Anfanges
 geswistreit ist das ende. Wer ausgesendet wirt, der ist pflichtig
 wider zu komen" (10-11). One should not complain about what must
 happen. The life that is lent to a man must be returned to the lender:
 "Was ein mensche entlehent, das sol es widergeben. . . . jegliches
 mensche ist uns ein sterben schuldig und in angeerbt zu sterben"
 (12-13, 16-17).

The Plowman has proceeded all along from the assumption that life
 is good and worth living. In order to portray himself as a good, the
 Plowman's opponent must establish that life is not as good as the
 Plowman thinks. Having failed to reverse the Plowman's view of death,
 he now tries the opposite ploy of reversing the Plowman's view of
 life. He has already begun by assailing the Plowman's and mankind's
 collective wisdom in chapter xviii. Men, in his view, are aliens on
 this earth. They are due to be transformed from something to nothing:
 "Ellende bauen alle leut auf erden. Von icht zu nicht müssen sie
 werden" (13-14). He stresses the depressing, negative side of man's
 situation; old age is not a joy, "es ist süchtig, arbeitsam, ungestalt,
 kalt und allen leuten übel gefallen" (20-21). His choice of words
 reveals a contempt for man in the statement that ripe apples gladly
 fall into the mud: ". . . zeitig epfel fallen geren is das kot" (22-23).
 A more neutral expression such as "ripe apples gladly fall into the
 grass" would have carried a less scornful connotation. What we
 consider beautiful must become distorted and ugly: "Alle rosenfar
 mündelein, alle rote wengelein müssen bleich werden, alle lichte
 augen müssen tunkel werden" (25-27). His is a cruelly materialistic
 orientation. Huizinga describes the contempt for the world expressed

in the macabre, late medieval literature on death as expressing "a very materialistic sentiment, namely, that all beauty and all happiness are worthless because they are bound to end soon."⁹⁸ He calls such a renunciation based on disgust unchristian. The interaction between the Christian and folk traditions in Tepl's characterization of the figure of Death will be discussed later in this chapter.

Chapter XXI

In chapter xxi the reversal of roles is maintained. The Plowman continues to behave calmly and to set a salutary example for Death. In his previous speech the Plowman scolded Death for refusing to accept reproof, saying: "Wer übel tut, wil nicht undertan sein und strafung leiden und aufnehmen, sunder mit allen dingen übermut treiben" (6-7). Now he demonstrates by his own example how Death should take reproof: "Gute strafung gütlich aufnehmen, darnach tun sol weiser man, höre ich die klugen jehen. Euer strafung ist auch leidenlich" (1-2). Whereas earlier the Plowman vowed never to relinquish his grief and accused Death of trying to influence him to do so, he now reverses his position and inquires how he may forget and rid himself of his pain, using such zealous terms as ausgraben, austilgen, und ausjagen. This appeal for advice on how to overcome his great loss would seem to be the first strong support for Brand's thesis. Strangely, however, Brand devotes little attention to this chapter. The Plowman here seems to pause and at least honestly try to consider what Death has to suggest. At the same time, however, his appeal is still based on the idea of restitution, on what he believes to be a legal right. Death is duty bound to make good the loss that he has caused: "Hilfe, rates und widerbringens seit ir mir pflichtig, wann ir habt mir getan den

schaden" (16-17). The Plowman has not accepted Death's right to take his wife. He speaks to Death here more or less as an equal before the law and ends with the threat that, unless Death makes compensation, God will have to avenge it: "Wo das nicht geschehe, gerochen müsst es werden--weder dann got het in seiner almechtigkeit nindert rachtung!--und solte darumb hauen und schaufeln noch eins gemutet werden!" (17-20).

The fact that the Plowman still maintains his legal prerogative shows he has not given up. This chapter presents the Plowman at his most docile. It is a dramatic sort of wavering on the brink before finally and definitively rejecting Death's solution and renewing the attack.

The Plowman still holds to the naive idea that God must be avenged because He is not associated with the deed and must be offended by it. His threat, "solte darumb hauen und schaufeln noch eins gemutet werden!" (20), appears to be either a reference to his own suicide, which seems very unlikely, or represents an absurd threat to kill Death himself. This, in turn, is either more bluffing on the Plowman's part or a further example of the intentional characterization of the Plowman's naiveté through a parody of the credulous idea that one can kill Death. This theme is taken up in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, a story which deals with three village rogues who foolishly set out to find death and kill him.

Chapter XXII

Despite his new, more rational stance and his request for advice, the Plowman again temporarily lapses into lamenting over his wife in the way that he did in the first part of the debate. Death does not understand why the Plowman continues to grieve and is angered by it.

Seeing that his stoical counsel has met with little success, Death again loses patience and turns abusive. He mocks the Plowman's threat, "Ga! Ga! ga! snatert die gans" (1) and insults the Plowman with the words "Kanstu es versteen, stumper pickel?" (35-36). Death's severest speech so far is matched by his most arrogant and overweening claim, the assertion that all of life is created for the sake of Death: "Lass dir eingeen und vernim: das leben ist durch sterbens willen geschaffen" (6-7). With new harshness he says: "Eintweder du bist sere ledig oder unvernunft hauset zu dir" (9-10). This statement represents a distinct contrast to his earlier, more tolerant comment on the Plowman's attitude which we recall from chapter ii: "Du tust dem geleich, als dir ernst sei und dich not swerlich betwinge" (ii: 10-11). He continues now with sharp impatience: ". . . brich ab! lass faren! nim für dich, das ein wint ist das leben der leute auf erden!" (11-12).

Whereas the Plowman has maintained all along that Death owes him restitution, Death now again cleverly reverses his opponent's argument, insisting that it is not Death who owes the Plowman something but vice versa. Death is the toll keeper to whom every man owes his life: "Seint den malen das wir ein zolner sein, dem alle menschen ir leben zollen" (3-4). Under the circumstances the best thing a man can do is to avoid sorrow by practicing restraint in all his undertakings and relationships. One must avoid all joy, pain, fear, and hope: "Aristotiles hat dich es vor gelert, das freude, leit, forchte und hoffnung die viere alle werlt beküern und nemlich die sich vor in nicht können hüten" (13-16). These polarities produce the opposing extremes of man's experience: "Freude und forchte kürzen, leit und

hoffenung lengen die weil" (16). Each is individually followed by its opposite: "Nach freude trübsal, nach liebe leit muss hie auf erden komen" (18-19). They are complimentary and inseparable: "Liebe und leit müssen mit einander wesen: eines ende ist anfang des andern" (19-20).

Chapter XXIII

The Plowman remains calm in spite of Death's insults. He concedes that Death's proverbs sound good. Banishing all love and hope would help one to avoid pain; but what would life be without them? He counters Death's polarities with a set of opposites of his own: good and evil constantly vie with each other for supremacy in man's thoughts. It is a law of human nature that the mind is never idle but is always occupied with either good or evil: "Wann menschliches mutes sinn kan nicht müssig wesen: eintweder gutes oder arges muss allzeit der sinn wirken" (9-10). This opposition is as inevitable as the others: "Würden dann dem sinn gute gedanken benomen, so würden im böse eingeen; gut aus--böse ein, böse aus--gut ein: die wechselung muss biss an das ende der werlt weren" (11-14). One must cultivate the good to combat evil, particularly in these days since the decline of courtly virtues. The Plowman clings to the memory of his wife as his guiding principle against evil. If he were to forget her he would be an evil person.

Brand gives little significance to this chapter, oddly dismissing it as "schwach und belanglos."⁹⁹ Far from being weak and irrelevant, however, it is actually one of the most important chapters in the debate and contains the Plowman's strongest reply to and rejection of Death's claims. It represents the backbone of the Plowman's opposition to Death and his most poignant affirmation of life. Structurally, it

is placed back to back with Death's most exaggerated claim to primacy over life, his assertion that life was created for the sake of death.

The Plowman may have made an honest effort to hear out Death's solution, but he ends by rejecting in no uncertain terms Death's stoic recommendation to drive the memory of love out of his heart. In reply he gives his strongest, most moving, and only real defense against Death--his love for his wife. Rather than forgetting about his wife and driving love out of his heart, he says that as long as he lives she will live on in his memory: ". . . als mer wil ich meiner allerliebsten allweg gedenken. . . . ferre wege, lange jar scheiden nicht lieb *mit *lieb. Ist sie mir leiblichen tot, in meiner gedechtnüss lebt sie doch immer" (18-23).

Contrary to Brand's assertion that Death has proved his case, the Plowman is not convinced. He closes with the words that Death must give him better advice than this: "Her Tot, ir müsset getreulicher raten, sol euer rat icht nutzes bringen" (23-24). From this point on, in fact, his opposition, rather than declining, stiffens.

In his next speech the Plowman renews his attack. He is forced back into active opposition by Death's tactical errors of exaggerating his own importance (chapter xxii), and insulting man (xxiv). In attacking the two values that the Plowman still firmly believes in and prizes most highly, his love for his wife and man's worth, Death prevents his opponent from accepting his counsel and provokes the Plowman to counterattack, crying: "Pfei euch, böser schandensack!" (xxv,1).

Chapter XXIV

Death himself acknowledges in this chapter that the Plowman has

rejected his advice: "Wer umb rat bittet und rates nicht folgen wil, dem ist auch nicht zu raten. Unser gütlich rat kan an dir nicht geschaffen" (2-4). This failure provokes him to try a still stronger tactic. He attempts to debase the object of the Plowman's love, the ideal of womanhood which he cherishes. Death intends to tell the gruesome truth which he has up to now held back. It is a sad fact that beneath even the most beautiful woman's exterior lies nothing but baseness. What the Plowman bewails is in reality worthless and disgusting. He recites a whole list of the most insulting metaphors to describe man's physical nature. Man is: "ein besmirter binstock, ein *glanzer unflat, ein unreiner lust, ein kotfass, ein wurmspeise" (11-12) and worse.

Although the theme sounds the same as that often repeated in memento mori literature, the emphasis is slightly different. Memento mori literature teaches one to value the life in the hereafter over this life by explaining that what man now admires will not last, but, at death, will become ugly. The Frau Welt symbol refers primarily to the state of physical decomposition after death, in the snakes, toads, and skeleton which make up the back. The Plowman's opponent, however, emphasizes the disgusting physical nature of the living man. From Death's point of view there is nothing admirable in man. The Plowman makes far too much of him. Death objects: ". . . dein holes herze wil aus leuten mer machen dann die gewesen mügen. Du machest aus einem menschen was du wilt, es mag nicht mer gesein dann als vil ich dir sagen wil" (6-9). He concludes rudely that the Plowman must let both his love and his sorrow go: "La hin fliessen lieb, la hin fliessen leit, lass rinnen den Rein als ander wasser! Esel! Dorfweiser götling!" (28-29).

As has been pointed out, the roles are now reversed. Whereas formerly the Plowman--the representative of life--attacked Death, it is now Death who attacks the value of life. This development, however, is not accompanied by increasing docility on the part of the Plowman, who actively defends man. The pitch of the battle is not diminished. Both combatants continue to insult each other.

Chapter XXV

Brand regards chapter xxv, along with chapters xxiv, xxviii, and xxix, as a sort of detour in the argument, having no real function in the development of the debate.¹⁰⁰ While it is true that these chapters do not show progress toward the Plowman's proposed change of heart, it is not true that they are not important to the debate. On the contrary, in chapter xxv the Plowman presents his second strongest attack on the assertion that all life is miserable and only exists for the sake of Death. He argues for the value of life and the worth of man as God's good creation.

The Plowman's pointed statements that he is not convinced cannot be overlooked. He springs to the defense, crying: "Pfei, euch, böser schandensack!" (1). Any progress toward conciliation is contradicted by his claim to have unmasked Death as a fraud and Death's assertion that he was created in paradise as a lie: "Allererst brüfe ich, das ir lügenhaftig seit und in dem paradisse nicht getirnet, als ir sprechet" (3-4). Death's slander of man proves that he is no tool of God, since any servant of God would know that God created man and all things to be good. Far from remaining on the defensive, the Plowman traps Death in a contradiction and opposes him directly: "Weret ir in dem paradisse gefallen, so wesset ir, das got den menschen und alle

ding beschaffen hat, und hat sie alle zumale gut beschaffen" (5-7). The argument he uses is one which Death cannot deny and never does refute. Man cannot be as vile as Death claims, for God would then be a bad creator:

Solte dann der mensche so böse und so unrein sein, als ir sprechet, werlich, so het got unreiniglich und unnützlischen gewürket! Solte gotes allmechtige und wirdige hant so ein unreines und unfletiges menschwerk haben gewürket, als ir schreibet, streflicher, gemeilter würker were er; so stünde auch das nicht, das got alle ding und den menschen über sie alle zumale gut het beschaffen (11-16).

Death does not deny that.

With the introduction of this paradox Tepl returns to the question of God's nature. Man is indeed a base and perishable creature, but he is also the image of God, a part of the creation which God called good. God is responsible for both aspects of man.

Although it is man's soul, rather than his body, which was formed in God's image, it is of the senses which the Plowman now speaks, and of the body "der lieblich kloss" (40). The amazing senses reveal the care and skill with which God fashioned man and are evidence of man's value. As mentioned, the book of Job also places heavy emphasis on the theme of God's loving care in shaping man and deals at length with the question of man's worth and what he may expect from God. Both protagonists are puzzled by the contradiction between the concern for man evidenced in the act of creation and God's apparent lack of concern over the destruction of His creature, His nonintervention in Death's doings and Job's sufferings. Throughout the debate the Plowman clings exclusively to the image of God as the loving creator and is unable to conceive of his wife's death as anything other than a breakdown of moral providence. It is not until after God's verdict that this view

is changed. Death's evil slander of man merely reinforces the Plowman's position.

Chapter XXVI

In addition to the five senses the Plowman praises man's reason. Death next undertakes to ridicule this faculty. He begins with the most reputable sciences and proceeds to the black arts and magic, significantly leaving out theology. He exults that in spite of all man's great cleverness, he still must fall victim to Death. He hopes to undermine his opponent's confidence in himself, calling him "üppiger geuknecht!" (40). Job's opponents likewise question the efficacy of any man's wisdom to deal with the issues Job examines.

Chapter XXVII

The Plowman's unruffled reaction to Death's insult in chapter xxvi shows that he still has the upper hand: "Man sol nicht übel mit übel rechnen, gedultig sol ein man wesen, gebieten der tugent lerer; den pfat wil ich nach treten, ob ir icht noch nach ungedult gedultig werdet" (1-3).

In this chapter the Plowman does directly ask advice from Death and in a respectful way. Yet one must consider whether or not this really represents a capitulation to Death's claims of justness, priority over life, and man's meanness; or whether it is not possible that the Plowman asks Death's advice purely for the sake of hearing his opinion on a troublesome matter. He still rejects the solutions Death has offered thus far, saying, "I see you think you have advised me well": "Ich vernim an euer rede: ir meinet, ir ratet mir gar getreulichen" (3-4). But he wishes to hear if Death still cannot give him some useful advice. He hopes to bind him to this with an oath: ". . . so ratet

mir in treuen, in gesworen eides weise" (4-5).

The Plowman now considers whether he should choose a secular or a clerical life, stating that he has found all walks of life to be imperfect. The only institution he wholeheartedly endorses is wedded life. This life gives meaning to work, produces virtue and good behavior:

Wünnesam, lustsam, fro und wolgemut ist ein man, der
ein biderweib hat, er wander wo er wander. Einem jedem
solichem man ist auch lieb nach narung zu stellen und
nach eren zu trachten. Im ist auch lieb, ere mit eren,
treue umb treue, gut mit gute zu bezahlen und
widergelten (16-20).

It is the only value he still clings to, the source of good behavior and high ideals.

Bäuml notes that the Plowman has not mentioned his right to grieve for a while. He asserts that "With the falling away of the Ploughman's insistence that he had a right to grieve, the necessity for his former antagonistic attitude toward Death also ceases."¹⁰¹ But the fact that the Plowman has not mentioned his right to grieve for a while does not necessarily mean that he has given it up. The Plowman momentarily forgets his despair in the heat of defending the values he will not surrender.

Chapter XXVIII

Seeing the importance which the Plowman places on married bliss, the last stronghold of virtue in a vain world, Death in the guise of giving advice, now seeks to undermine this single aspect of life which the Plowman praises. After having attacked the physical nature of the object of the Plowman's devotion, he turns to discrediting woman's character and role as wife. In his libelous attack he repeats

with reverse meaning the words he has used earlier (ch. xiv) to defend himself, referring to his act as unser genade and saying: "mit ungekrenkten eren haben wir sie in unser genade enphangen" (8-9). This time he gleefully comments that no husband may rid himself of a shrewish wife unless Death favors him with his genade.

In this chapter Tepl uses the interplay of contrasts to provide a kind of comic relief. First Death accuses the Plowman of immoderate praise of women and then himself proceeds to blame them immoderately. This humorous depiction of Death's foibles represents a counterpoint to the Plowman's credulousness in his earlier speeches. The characterization of Death as a comic and fallible figure serves to make him less formidable and a more suitable match for the Plowman. Such glimpses of the foibles of both combatants, in addition to the insults they hurl at each other, provide a certain comic relief and distance to so solemn a topic.

Chapter XXIX

It is clear to the Plowman by now that Death's opinions are not to be trusted. Death's unchivalrous views cannot be associated with God's. His latest defamation of women particularly rankles the Plowman who loses patience and replies with an insult to Death as he has not done for some time, calling him "haubtman von kriege!" (26). He no doubt feels betrayed after having made a request in good faith for advice about whether or not to remarry, that Death should answer him with a disrespectful and slanderous indictment of married life. He bravely defends marriage and the ennobling influence of women, praising them as the protectresses and teachers of virtue and high ideals. Undaunted, he continues to affirm this aspect of life and to cling to

the memory of his wife as his guiding principle and ideal for a good and worthy life.

Chapter XXX

Death responds to the Plowman's insult with an angry insult of his own in which he uses his by now characteristic technique of juxtaposition. In this case he opposes precious and worthless articles which a fool like the Plowman can't distinguish, saying: ". . . als vil als ein esel leiren kan, als vil kanstu die warheit vernemen" (13-14).

Whereas Death earlier has attached individually man's accomplishments in the sciences, his physical body, and marriage, he now extends his attack to include the whole of life which he pictures as futile and vain in every respect. Both man and Death claim to have been created by God in paradise. The question at issue concerns who is to be the ultimate master of the earth. Death realizes his function is only justified if all of life can be devalued. His view point appears to resemble the sentiment, commonly expressed in memento mori literature, that the attractions of this life are deceptions. One should prepare for and look forward to the hereafter, for, as Augustine said, to die is to be "delivered from this bondage of sin" (City of God, Bk. xiii, Ch. 3). Yet Death barely mentions the hereafter. Instead of stressing an alternative to life, as Augustine does, the Plowman's opponent gloats over its extinction. His view is a strangely nihilistic one for a self-proclaimed servant of God. He emphasizes repeatedly how all must be changed by him from something into nothing, but refers only in passing to the blessings of the hereafter.

Again in this chapter Death tries to show the Plowman's lament for his wife to be futile and absurd in comparison to the more famous and

important figures who also have passed on. Death cannot resist exulting in his power over even the greatest of men: "Dannoch beleiben wir Tot hie herre!" (25-26). His attitude does not reflect the divine origin of his power.

Chapter XXXI

The Plowman's last speech returns to the opening theme of Death's justice and to the antagonism he showed toward his opponent earlier in the debate. His final speech of the debate shows the least inclination of any chapter so far to accept and be consoled by Death's arguments. In it the Plowman attacks even more strongly than he did in chapters xxi and xxv. Instead of being reconciled to Death, the Plowman expresses grave doubts about Death's arguments and points out contradictions in them.

Brand has little to say about chapter xxxi, calling it simply a summing up of the situation which is "weder sehr Überzeugend noch dichterisch stark."¹⁰² To say at this point that the Plowman is convinced by Death's arguments simply does not fit the Plowman's words in this chapter. He says here no less than four times that he is not persuaded and repeatedly accuses Death of lying, of saying one thing and then another:

Eigen rede verurteilt dicke einen man und sunderlich
einen, der jetztunt eines und danach ein anderes redet.
. . . Zwo widerwertig rede mügen mit einander nicht
war gesein. . . . Nach euer wechselrede, kan sich
niemand gerichten. . . . Mit euer wankelrede, darauf
nu niemand bauen sol, wellet ir mich von meiner klage
schrecken (1-2, 5-6, 15-16, 25-27).

In these comments there is little of the docile suppliant to be seen. They give no evidence that the Plowman's mind is changed.

The Plowman proceeds to point out specific inconsistencies in Death's arguments. He first attacks Death's assertion that all life collectively and earth itself will have an end. Death boasts that he then will be lord here. But if there is no life on the earth, there will also be no more death; that is, Death will no longer have a function. The Plowman feels he has caught Death in a clear contradiction.

The Plowman also contradicts Death's emphasis on the annihilation of created things by citing the authority of "Plato and other philosophers" who say that the end of one thing is the beginning of another. All things are founded on the transformation of one into another in a kind of eternal renewal.

In this last speech the Plowman reasserts his best defense of life, the argument that Death has not answered and cannot gainsay. Although Death says that man is evil, stupid, and useless, man is nevertheless God's creation and, therefore, cannot be other than good. Death's position is inconsistent with the definition of God as a good creator. Death offers no answer to the objections raised by the Plowman in this chapter, but seems to ignore them completely. The question how God, as the creator of a contradictory world order, is to be viewed is left open.

Again we must ask if the contention that Death convinces the Plowman of the necessity of his part in the world order is really born out. It is hard to see how this can be maintained when the Plowman's final speech itself assails the truthfulness of Death's arguments, and his final words in the debate express his skepticism and his determination not to abandon his complaint: "Mit euer wankelrede, darauf nu niemant bauen sol, wellet ir mich von meiner klage schrecken. Des

beruf ich mich mit euch an Got meinen heilant, her Tot, mein verderber" (25-28). His last words are not even conciliatory: "Damit gebe euch got alles übel! Amen" (28-29).

The Plowman's last offensive is quieter than his first offensive, but it is not a weak one. It merely represents a different kind of argumentation. The Plowman has shifted from woebegone lamenting and cursing to reasoned arguing and affirmation of the values he still believes in. The two requests for advice do not constitute an acceptance of Death's arguments. In fact, he pointedly rejects Death's advice when he finds that it consists of stoic prescriptions and slander of women. Nowhere does the Plowman state that Death has convinced him.

This analysis concludes that the Plowman's position cannot be characterized as a uniform progression from attacker to accepting suppliant, but rather he exhibits a variety of approaches, alternately becoming angry, high-handed, sincere, sarcastic, etc.. All of these approaches are part of the intended rhetorical display, a show of virtuosity in which variety seems to be more important than consistency. His request for advice is only one of the many attitudes he exhibits. The shifting of the offensive back and forth between the contestants, the changes in tactics, the give and take of the debate, all underline the conclusion that the match is intended to end in a draw.

It is not Death who convinces the Plowman of the rightness of the world order, but it is God who does it. If the Plowman were defeated by Death's arguments, as Brand and Bäuml suggest, and recognized his error, God's role in the debate would be greatly diminished in importance. There would be no purpose in bringing the matter up before God at all. It is significantly God's appearance and His

verdict in the case which bring about the real change in the Plowman, who accepts God's judgment and ceases questioning as does Job in similar circumstances.

Chapter XXXII

In his final speech Death does not attempt to reply to the Plowman's charges that there are glaring inconsistencies in his arguments. Instead he summarizes and restates what he has already said about the vanity and miserableness of human life and, at the last, abruptly offers some very orthodox Christian advice: turn from evil, do good, keep a clean conscience. In this final speech Death seems to show a new side, partially returning to the more pious face he showed at the beginning of the debate. His parting words are very unlike the advice which he has offered up to this point. Here he does not insult man or resort to the kind of unacceptable, stoic arguments which he has offered before. When asked for his counsel on earlier occasions, Death showed a singular lack of sympathy or inclination to comfort the Plowman, arguing only that it was useless and wrong to grieve, that old age is not a blessing anyway, and that one must endeavor to avoid love and joy for they ultimately only bring pain. Asked for his recommendations on the subject of marriage, he has replied by maliciously slandering women. But in these last few words he drops his snide attitude and offers his first acceptable advice. It is not advice on how to cope with grief or a defense of himself, but advice on how to live.

It is odd that he should wait to the very end to give it. It comes as a surprise after his assertions that life exists for the sake of death, his deprecations of man's physical nature, of women, and his condemnation of the vanity of the world. His advice on how

to live may be what God is referring to in saying Death has spoken the truth, since much else that he has said would not be applauded by God.

Parts of Death's last speech are reminiscent of the catalog of man's activities given in chapter 28 of the book of Job. Both stress the vanity and futility of these activities and the fact that true wisdom is only to be found in God and in the pursuit of the knowledge of Him.

We do not know what the Plowman's response would have been to these words. He has already made his last speech of the debate. Perhaps Tepl saves this for the end because it might have unbalanced the debate too much in favor of Death. The issue is left to God to decide.

Tepl's Characterization of the Figure of Death

We have considered the naive and erroneous concept of God which characterizes the Plowman's viewpoint in the debate. A comparison of Death's arguments with certain common medieval attitudes about death reveals a bias of another kind. An examination of the way in which the conflicting Christian and folk traditions interact in Tepl's characterization of the figure of Death gives us further insight into the plan of Tepl's debate. A work which is particularly pertinent to an examination of the Ackermann is the Tractatus de Crudelitate Mortis, another dialogue between Death and man, which Tepl is believed to have had a copy of and to have borrowed from in composing his own work.¹⁰³ A consideration of the arguments and phrases from the Tractatus which Tepl incorporated into his Ackermann and those that he left out indicates that he purposely characterized Death in a more negative way than the Tractatus does.

Perhaps the most noticeable difference between the two depictions of death is that Tepl's figure seems to purposely avoid arguments which would offer some real consolation to a bereaved person. Only twice in the Ackermann debate does Death offer a consoling thought about the afterlife. In Chapter xiv he says that the Plowman's wife has earned eternal rest and joy as a result of her good life. He even suggests that the Plowman's soul may eventually join that of his wife in heaven. In chapter viii he hints that she may expect a reward. Aside from these references, however, Death gives none of the traditional arguments of consolation which appear in other works on the subject of death. The figure of Death in the Tractatus twice explains that Christ has completely conquered him:¹⁰⁴

Quam Christus per me devicit
Sicud per prophetam dicit:
'O mors, tuus ero morsus,'
Ego reddo bona prorsus
In terra vivencium
(13,3-7)

He adds that because of Christ's victory, he has become the means through which the world is reborn and that death should actually be precious to the sanctified: "Me Christus est amplexatus, / Per me mundus est renatus, / Ego sanctis presiosa" (14,1-3). He helpfully explains that she can be overcome, if not escaped:

Hoc mandavit ipse Deus,
Ut stringatur per me reus:¹⁰⁵
Ergo proferte modum, (Ego)
Quo meum solvatis nodum,
Vel certe vos emendetis,
Quia me non evadetis
(23,1-6)

The figure of Death in the Ackermann does not mention any of these consolations. Christ is referred to only once and not in the debate itself but in the closing prayer.

Burdach was particularly impressed by the fact that the work lacks all mention of Mary and the saints who customarily were called on to intercede for the souls of the dead.¹⁰⁶ He interpreted this absence as characteristic of what he called the "free religiosity" (freie Religiosität) of pre-reformation sects in Bohemia and attempted to link Tepl with religious reform groups such as the Taborites who rejected the intercession of the saints, believing instead that God could be approached directly. Burdach's suggestion that Tepl himself opposed the veneration of the saints is contradicted, however, by Tepl's documented provision for an office in honor of Saint Jerome (the "St.-Hieronymus-Offizium" at the St. Niklas Church in Eger).¹⁰⁷

Burdach's interpretation also does not explain the absence of any mention of Christ's victory over death in the Ackermann. Although the Tractatus does not refer to Mary or the saints, it does mention Christ many times. An alternate explanation might be that Tepl simply wanted to characterize his figure of Death more negatively than the other work did and not to give his character too many redeeming qualities so as not to unbalance the debate in Death's favor.

Death in the Ackermann does not console his opponent with the argument that death is good to the good, as does Death in the Tractatus:

Respondet mors: Non sum dura,
 Tempus meum dat futura
 Bonis bona, malis mala
 Meritorum ex mea salla (messella)
 (12,1-4)

This common consolation is expressed by Saint Paul in the New Testament when he writes: "For me . . . to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) and by St. Augustine who comments: "Of the first and bodily death,

then, we may say that to the good it is good, and evil to the evil"
(City of God, Bk. xiii, Ch. 2).

Many of the arguments describing Death as a positive force for good which are used in the Tractatus do not appear in the Ackermann. In the Tractatus Death argues, for instance, that he removes cruel tyrants from the earth thereby ending their crimes and alleviating the suffering of humanity: "Ecce crudeles tyranni . . . si eos non visitarem, / Culpas eis ampliarem / Et penam pauperibus" (15:1, 5-7). Tep1's Death mentions only his control of overpopulation. In the Tractatus Death also says that she causes many men to turn from crimes: "Et multi meo timore / Corde, visu, manu, ore / Derelinquunt vicia" (12,5-7). She calls herself the sinner's cudgel, the wrongdoer's switch. If death were to leave the world, evils would spread further, since God himself has ordered Death to hold culprits in check:

. . . ego fustis peccatorum
Virga sum et pravorum, (improborum)

Me a vobis iam evello,
A gravamine apello
Et effundar latius.

Hoc mandavit ipse Deus,
Ut stringatur per me reus:
(22,3-23,2)

Death in the Ackermann makes use of a similar argument, but instead of stressing his role as a positive good, he emphasizes man's wickedness, saying that all men are so inclined to evil that none of them does anything good except out of fear of death: "Alle menschen sein mer zu bosheit dann zu tugent geneiget. Tut nu jemant ichts gutes, das tut er uns besorgend! (xxxii,11-13).

Instead of describing how death can be overcome, as does the Tractatus, or referring to Mary's intercession for the dying, as do many other late medieval works, the Plowman's opponent lists all the things that will not rescue one from death. Instead of Christ, the sacraments or the saints, Death lists witches, doctors and magic potions, stressing the negative aspect and the hopelessness of the situation:

Alle die meister, die geiste können betwingen, . . . Die bilwis und die zauberinne können vor uns nicht beleiben: sie hilfet nicht, das sie reiten auf den krücken, das sie reiten auf den böcken. Die erzte, die den leuten das leben lengen, müssen uns zu teil werden: würze, kreuter, salben und allerlei apotekenpulver können sie nicht gehelfen" (vi,11-17).

The Plowman berates Death for taking virtuous people and leaving the wicked. He implies that good people should be spared. Death, on the other hand, argues for impartiality. Yet Death does not explain why the virtuous cannot be spared. One traditional explanation found in the writings of Augustine is that if virtuous people were spared, everyone would want to be saved for the wrong reason and "faith itself would be thereby enervated" (City of God, Bk. xiii, Ch. 4). Nor does Death try to justify the concept of impartiality on the grounds that some element of uncertainty and pain is necessary as a test of disinterested virtue. This major theme in the book of Job, though pertinent to the problem, remains undeveloped in the Ackermann. Such arguments likewise might have strengthened Death's position more than Tepl wished to.

Instead of holding out the hope of a blessed afterlife for the souls of the faithful, as he might be expected to do if he is really God's servant, Death argues from a strictly worldly and materialistic

point of view. Old age is not a blessing because physical beauty fades. Life is of little value precisely because it does not last. The rationalizations he gives express a materialistic, stoic attitude: ". . . am besten zu sterben, wann am besten liebet zu leben" (xiv, 10-11). Such values as love, joy and hope are to be avoided because they ultimately bring only pain.

Instead of giving positive arguments to justify his existence and offering comfort to the Plowman, Death concentrates on denying the value of life. He devalues human knowledge and accomplishments in general, the sciences in particular, the institution of marriage and man's physical body. There is no positive consolation, only doubtful rationalizations such as his argument that if it were not for death, overpopulation would make life unbearable anyway. The Plowman never poses or deals with the question why the universe should be ordered this way. Death's most nihilistic statement, that life is created for the sake of death: ". . . das leben ist durch sterbens willen geschaffen" (xxii,7), which is suspect according to the account of creation given in Genesis, is never disputed.

Considering Death's conspicuous lack of positive arguments, it is no wonder the Plowman sees him as God's enemy and not as God's servant. As has been suggested, Tepl seems to have purposely depicted Death more negatively than he need have. The fact that he did not use all the arguments available to him in defending Death's position indicates that he did not intend for Death to convince the Plowman. He deliberately characterizes Death not as God's advocate or the consoler representing God's point of view, which Brand suggests, but primarily as the opponent of the Plowman, the representative of the

negative side of the argument, for the purpose of producing a lively debate.

In the Tractatus a clear differentiation is made between the first death and the second death. A distinction which, as we have mentioned, the Plowman plainly fails to grasp. Tepl must have been aware of this difference from his reading of the Tractatus in which Death clearly says that she is merely a physical process, "the mistress of the flesh," and that she does not condemn: "Ego carnis sum domatrix / Et non illa mors dampnatrix" (13, 1-2). In explaining that Death can be overcome but not escaped, he acknowledges that there is a second aspect to the process. After death, he says, there is good to the good and bad to the bad according to merit, but Death himself does not cause damnation. Thus death in the Tractatus is depicted as an impartial force and separated from the function of judgment. Why is this distinction not made in the Ackermann? The Plowman repeatedly refers to Death as a "false judge," and Death does not contest this designation. Perhaps both the Plowman and Death fail to make the distinction because it would have robbed Death of some of the malice and importance necessary to make him a good opponent for the Plowman. Stating directly that Death is merely a process of transition and does not judge would have placed the real responsibility on God, a truth which the Plowman is intended to learn only as a result of God's verdict. It would have required a better understanding of God's nature than the Plowman possesses. Tepl required a naive and confused Plowman and a belligerent Death to insure a lively debate as an interesting vehicle for the rhetorical display he planned.

Both the Tractatus and the Ackermann contain elements of the two conflicting medieval ways of regarding death, the gleeful, malicious death figure of the Totentanz tradition and the more hopeful Christian view. In common with the Totentanz tradition, the Ackermann shares the persistent theme of death's inevitability and power (ii, 16-17; xvi, 15-18; 21-27; xxvi, 3-6; 38-40), his impartiality (vi, 7-11; 19-24; xvi, 5-9), the emphasis on extinction and decay (x, 13-14; xx, 14; 25-27), on the repulsive, physical side of man (chapter xxiv), the vanity of life (xxx, 5-7; xxxii, 13-14; 33-35), and its transience (xxxii, 4-5; 14-16; xxiv, 24-25). Elements of the Christian view are to be seen in Death's acknowledgment that he is God's hantgezeuge (xvi, 4) and was created in paradise (xvi, 30-31), as well as his brief mention of the eternal bliss awaiting the soul of the Plowman's wife (xiv, 19-21) and his praise of God in his closing speech.

The Tractatus by comparison gives stronger emphasis to the more positive picture of death. The view that eventually wins out in the Ackermann is the Christian view. Although God does not actually call Death His messenger, He clearly indicates that He has given Death his power and that Death operates with His sanction.

The victory of the Christian view, however, is not without difficulties. By linking God more closely with death, this view raises new questions about God's nature. The image of an evil, gleeful and malicious death does not mesh well with the view of Death as God's hand. The religious interpretation faces the problem of either denying the badness of death or of trying to reconcile the brutality and maliciousness of the Totentanz figure with God's control of this function. The incompatibilities between the two traditions give rise to

some of the questions about God's nature which are the subject of the Ackermann debate.

The Verdict

Both the Plowman and Death have ended by calling on God to settle the dispute; the Plowman cursing Death and saying: "Des berufe ich mich mit euch an Got, . . . Damit gebe euch got alles übel! Amen" (xxxix, 27-29), and Death, confident of his case, saying: ". . . des komen wir mit dir an Got, den ewigen, den grossen und den starken" (xxxix, 53-54). In chapter xxxviii God appears, not in a great thunderstorm, but relatively quietly and makes the awaited judgment. What is his verdict? Does it answer the questions the Plowman has raised about the fairness of Death or explain why God tolerates such an evil or clarify His relationship to a contradictory world order?

Unfortunately God's answer is not at all clear. Although God reaches a decision in the debate, He explains nothing of the reasons for His decision. Taken altogether, the verdict is rather unsatisfactory to anyone who had expected answers. We learn that God is ultimately responsible for and approves of Death, including the death of the Plowman's wife. He affirms His control of the world order in general terms. But He does not explain why the universe is ordered as it is or why Death operates the way he does.

Each contestant is both reprimanded and rewarded. Even though God technically grants the victory to Death: "Darumb: klager habe ere! Der Tot habe sig!" (18), it is not an unqualified victory. The Plowman is also honored. Each is reprovved for having made inappropriate claims on part of God's creation. Both have claimed to possess some-

thing that was not theirs and have viewed the world order from a false perspective. The Plowman has praised the creation, but his fault is that he seems to have loved it too much, wanting to possess it. Death, on the other hand, has gloried in his power and has wanted to make his function more important than life.

In spite of these errors on both sides, God concedes that the conflict has not been unjustified: "Jedoch der krieg ist nicht gar on sach" (15-16). He acknowledges the Plowman's right to grieve over his lost wife. This would seem to contradict the contention that Death proves man has no right to grief: "Der Tod entkräftet Klage und Anklage, indem er beweist, dass kein sterblicher ,billichen' klagt, sondern aus Tummheit, aus Eichtslosigkeit" (Brand, p. 54). On the contrary, God's verdict recognizes this right: "Ir habt beide wol gefochten: den twinget leit zu klagen, disen die anfechtung des klagers die warheit zu sagen" (16-17).

God commends Death for having spoken the truth. This is a disturbing judgment since, surely, everything that Death has said cannot qualify as the truth and be approved by God. He has already been reprimanded for his error of arrogance. Which part of Death's speeches is meant?

The verdict itself does not resolve the debate. Far from providing an explanation, God merely restates and affirms the status quo with the pronouncement: "Seit jeder mensche dem Tode das leben, der erden den leib, die sele Uns pflichtig ist zu geben" (18-20). The ultimate nature of the relationship between life and death is left unexplained. Yet God's appearance produces a striking effect, a distinct change in viewpoint in the final prayer which follows it.

Before discussing the role of the final prayer in the debate, let us turn to the book of Job.

The Outcome of the Conflict in the Book of Job

The situation at the end of the debate in the book of Job closely resembles that in the Ackermann. Neither contestant has convinced the other and God is called on to settle the issue. The Job debate consists of three rounds of arguments in which each of Job's three friends attempts to convince him that his suffering is justified. The opponents become progressively more direct and specific in their accusations that Job is hiding some secret sin. Job becomes more and more resolute in defending his integrity and more confident that he is right as their successive arguments prove to be inadequate to explain his plight or to comfort him.

At first Job, like the Plowman, is frightened and confused by his suffering, cursing the day of his birth and no longer wishing to live. He appeals directly to God for justice, although he is painfully aware of his smallness and helplessness in relation to God and realizes that he cannot hope to contend with Him:

But how can a man be just before God?
If one wished to contend with him,
one could not answer him once in a thousand times.
.
Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.
(9:2-3,15)

If Job can find a reason for his suffering he will agree that it is justified and that the world order is functioning as it should.

Unlike the Plowman, Job from the beginning offers to listen and to give up his suit if his opponents can convince him that he is wrong

about his situation and what he sees in the world around him. He has said to the friends: "Teach me, and I will be silent; / make me understand how I have erred" (6:24). He makes an honest, soul-searching effort to find a reason for his calamity in his own sins and, having failed, says poignantly to the friends: "But now, be pleased to look at me; / for I will not lie to your face. . . . Is there any wrong on my tongue? / Cannot my taste discern calamity?" (6:28-30).

The opponents' arguments are mainly variations on a few basic themes which ignore or contradict the evidence of Job's plight. Primary among them is the truism that the good are always rewarded and the wicked punished. If Job is suffering, there has to be some reason. Where there is smoke there is fire. Like the Plowman's opponents, each of them admonishes Job that man is nothing. Whatever misery Job is suffering, it is less than he deserves. Man's wisdom is simply insufficient to understand God's ways. All advise him to humble himself, to repent, and God will deliver him.

The name calling and exchange of insults at times approach the intensity of those in the Ackermann. At the end of the first round of arguments, after all of them have spoken once and Job has replied to each one, he says to them: "As for you, you whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are you all" (13:4). In the second round he calls them "miserable comforters" speaking "windy words" (16:2-3). Angrily he cries, "But you, come on again, all of you, / and I shall not find a wise man among you" (17:10). To Zophar he replies: "How then will you comfort me with empty nothings? / There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood" (21:34).

In the third and last round of arguments the friends openly accuse Job of doing evil: "Is not your wickedness great? / There is no end to your iniquities" (22:5). Elipaz recites a long list of criminal accusations, which we know from the prologue to be unfounded. Job replies sarcastically:

How you have helped him who has no power!
 How you have saved the arm that has no strength!
 How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
 and plentifully declared sound knowledge!
 (26:2-5)

But Job's stand is not weakened. Now, far from giving in to his opponent's arguments, he becomes more and more firmly convinced that he is right. He has held out to the end; he has heard every argument his friends have to offer and has been tested to the full. They have given no satisfactory answer to his suffering, no comfort. There is no question of capitulation. Job says in his last speech before God intervenes:

Far be it from me to say that you are right;
 till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
 I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go;
 my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.
 (27:5-6)

He is determined to hold out:

as long as my breath is in me,
 and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;
 my lips will not speak falsehood,
 and my tongue will not utter deceit.
 (27:3-4)

As a last resort he swears the oath of innocence, the negative confession, and waits for God to answer: "Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!" (31:35) He is eager to have his case settled because he is confident of the outcome.

As in the Ackermann, the debate has reached an impasse:

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. (32:1-3)

Elihu himself says, "Behold, I waited for your words, / I listened for your wise sayings, . . . and, behold, there was none that confuted Job, / or that answered his words among you" (32:11-12). Since the friends have admittedly failed, only Elihu is left to attempt an answer. But Elihu does not succeed either. He adds a few new points, suggesting that suffering can be a warning and can cause a man to turn from wrongdoing--the assumption still being that Job's chastening is caused by secret sin--but mainly he repeats the arguments which have already been put forth by the friends and rejected by Job. Thus there is no resolution to the conflict before God's intervention.

Throughout Elihu's speech a powerful storm has been gathering on the horizon. Elihu's last words refer to the rumbling of thunder, to lightening, snow, hail and whirlwinds. Finally God speaks. One can imagine that all except perhaps Job have run for cover. But Job waits expectantly for an answer, terrified yet confident. An answer from God is his most earnest wish. When God speaks out of the whirlwind it is with shattering effect. His majestic words immediately dwarf Job's complaint. He says: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . when the morning stars sang together, / and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (38:2, 4-7). The impact of these words on Job can hardly be overstated. He falls in the dust laying his hand over his

mouth. Yet the fact that God answers him at all is, in part, a vindication of Job's suit. That God hears and answers Job is proof that man is not without rights in God's creation. He is not alone and unheard in the universe.

As stated earlier, Job's problem is that he must place God in the wrong in order that he may be right himself. Everything is at stake for Job. He is caught in an impossible dilemma. Either he is right and God is unjust, malevolent, or even indifferent, or else God is just and Job's rights, his integrity, even his sanity are forfeit. The situation seems insoluble. God says to Job: "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (40:8).

Job's response is to relinquish his claim and to cease questioning. His rebellion is over. He is overwhelmed, saying: "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? / I lay my hand on my mouth . . . I will proceed no further" (40:4-5). In response to God's query, "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Job replies, ". . . I have uttered what I did not understand, / things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . . I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, / but now my eye sees thee; / therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:3-6). It is the encounter with God, not the arguments of the opponents, which overcomes Job's rebellion.

Like the Plowman, Job is both reprimanded and rewarded for his part in the debate. He is reprimanded for speaking of what he did not understand. Then, however, God acknowledges that Job has spoken the truth, saying to Eliphaz two separate times: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has" (42:7).

In what sense has Job spoken the truth and the friends falsely? Job has said that God does not always act justly. Why does God condemn the friends when they have defended Him, arguing that He does always act justly and that suffering is always justified? After all, Job's restoration at the end would seem to confirm what the friends have said. His restoration, however, does not alter the fact that he has suffered without cause.

Job has spoken the truth in the terms of the wager. He has insisted that God was punishing him unjustly. According to the wager this was correct. God has praised Job with the words: ". . . there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man," saying to Satan: ". . . you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause" (2:3). The friends have been intellectually dishonest; they have closed their eyes to the evidence of the plight of those around them. Everyone does not get what he deserves. There are many cases of injustice. In asserting that God does not punish the righteous, that suffering is always retribution for sin, they have lied in order to defend their own interests. For if Job is innocent, then they are not safe either.

God's vindication of Job for speaking the truth is a vindication of "the right of a man with God" (16:21), a relationship which Job has affirmed all along. Job's opponents are alarmed by Job's audacity in speaking to God as he does and at his confidence in his integrity. They claim that man is nothing compared to God. Elihu says:

Look at the heavens, and see;
 and behold the clouds, which are higher than you.
 If you have sinned,
 what do you accomplish against him?
 And if your transgressions are multiplied,
 what do you do to him?
 If you are righteous, what do you give to him;
 or what does he receive from your hand?
 (34:5-7)

Eliphaz remarks: Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, / or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?" (22:3). The implication is that man can do nothing for God and is nothing to him. Yet we know from the prologue that God does care whether man is virtuous or not. He rejoices in Job's righteousness, and Job's disinterested virtue reflects directly on God.

The real test in the book of Job is whether or not man will serve God without motives of reward. It is the test of disinterested righteousness. Goodness for the sake of reward is frowned upon in the prologue. Satan scoffs: "Does Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land" (1:10). The prologue reveals that God is indeed affected by what Job does; God Himself stands to gain or lose by how Job withstands this trial.

Though Job does not know it, his "right of a man with God" is affirmed. Job never learns about the wager or the reason for his suffering. Even after God speaks to him, he is never told. Paradoxically, in his encounter with God Job relinquishes his claim to justice and to his rights. He trusts God simply because of what He is. The sight of God's full majesty causes him to affirm God's nature as the absolute which transcends understanding. The question of Job's innocence is drawed by this ineffable majesty and power. He repents his questioning, accepts and affirms God's right. Through this act God is vindicated in the wager, for Job, without learning the reason for his suffering, still affirms the principle that God deserves worship, not for the sake of reward, but simply because He is God, the alpha and

the omega, the final reality. This is the disinterested virtue that was the subject of the wager.

As in the Ackermann, much remains unexplained. God's ways are shrouded in mystery. But, though beyond Job's comprehension, God's ultimate justness and righteousness are affirmed, as well as His concern with man and man's own responsibility for righteousness.

The friends have said, in effect, that God is predictable. But Job has been honest enough to say that God is not predictable, while at the same time trying to hold on to his belief that God is just. The paradox of the book is that if God were always to behave predictably, that is, as man would expect Him to, He would no longer be free.

By accepting this paradox, Job allows God to be both just and free. The God who is revealed to Job is much larger than the simple rewarder and punisher of the friends' description. He proves that He is not under obligation to function within man's limits. In Robert Frost's play about Job, The Masque of Reason, a modern caricature of God says: "I had to prosper good and punish evil. / You changed all that. You set me free to reign. / You are the emancipator of your God."¹⁰⁸ In the book of Job God is not emancipated by Job, though vindicated by him in the wager. God reveals that the small conception of Him upon which the argument turned was but a fraction of His true nature. Job learns that "not all suffering is punishment, but that the rationale of what is not is known only to God."¹⁰⁹

No complete answer is given to the problem of suffering in either book. G. K. Chesterton states of the book of Job: "God comes in at the end, not to answer riddles, but to propound them."¹¹⁰ God's ways remain mysterious, the rationale governing the seemingly random selection

of men for suffering and death, an enigma. The best attempt at an answer results in a paradox: God is both just and free.

The Plowman faces a similar problem in arguing that Death should be both predictable and impartial. Predictability and impartiality, like God's justness and freedom, are linked in a paradox. The impartiality of death and God's justice overlap at some unknown point. But both are actually functions of God and beyond man's comprehension.

The Final Prayer

In both debates the answer comes from the realm of revelation. It is the experience of God's absolute sovereignty rather than specific explanations which affects the questioners. In each case the plaintiff abandons his suit, ceases questioning and affirms the order of the universe as it is.

In the old testament work Job's response to God's appearance to him represents the culmination of the work. Job affirms that God is more magnificent and more inscrutable than he had imagined. In the Ackermann the final prayer serves a similar function. Framed as a hymn to God's wonders in the world of nature, it reveals the vastness and splendor of a God who transcends explanations. The limited view of God expressed earlier by the Plowman is replaced by a new and larger concept. For the Plowman it is the Jobean realization that the real responsibility rests with God which forces an abrupt reevaluation of the concept he has held up to now. From the verdict he has learned that God is not the enemy of Death, but that Death operates with His sanction and under his auspices. God is not merely the chivalrous benefactor and avenger he has imagined. He controls both life and death. The

theme of oppositions and contradictions which has been such a pervasive feature of the debate so far is incorporated into the new explanation of God's nature, an explanation which includes aspects of both opponents' views.

There have been many schemes for analyzing the structure of the Ackermann debate. Most of them give only cursory treatment to the prayer, regarding it as an afterthought rather than as an integral part of the confrontation of the issues. There are, however, several reasons for suggesting that the closing prayer, far from being an afterthought, should be viewed as an essential part of the work.

According to Tepl's comment in his letter to Peter Rothirsch which indicates that the plaintiff is thoroughly pacified, or "is brought to yielding," one would anticipate a greater change in the Plowman's attitude than occurs in the debate itself. It would be expected that the Plowman, who began his suit with such intensity, should come to a better understanding about his grief than is provided by his last confused and doubting words to Death in chapter xxxi, his final speech in the debate.

The assertion that the Plowman has been convinced by Death is contradicted by the final words of his last two speeches: "Damit gebe euch got alles übel! Amen" (xxxix, 28-29) and "Das gelaubet, haubtman von kriege!" (xxix, 26). Since the Plowman's tone and words of chapter xxxi do not indicate that he is in any way satisfied or mollified by Death's arguments, perhaps we may be justified in looking to the prayer which follows God's appearance for the scene of the Plowman's real change of attitude.

In the prayer an attempt is made to finally come to terms with the issue of death and God's relationship to it. It supplies the culmination to the Plowman's search for an explanation. As in the book of Job, it is the reaction to God's verdict which constitutes the high point and goal of the work.

The prayer is not a separate piece, but is closely tied to the rest of the work. One such link is the use of the name Margaret in the prayer: "Mich reuet Margret, mein auserweltes weib" (xxxiv, 69-70) which corresponds to the first initial of the name of the wife mentioned in chapter iii by the Plowman: ". . . ir habt mir den zwelften buchstaben, meiner freuden hort, aus dem alphabet gar freissamlich enzücket" (iii,3-5) and in chapter iv by Death: "Da haben wir mit einer erbern seligen tochter unser genade gewürket; ir buchstabe was der zwelfte" (iv,8-9). The twelfth letter is the letter m. (The alphabet did not include j.) The name Margaret links the woman in the prayer to the Plowman.

If it could be established, as Blaschka, Bäuml and others suggest, that Tepl's work is purely a rhetorical fiction having no actual biographical basis in fact, there would be no doubt that the Plowman is still the speaker in the prayer. The only known historical records indicate that Tepl was married to a woman by the name of Klara who survived him.¹¹¹ It is generally assumed that Tepl must have been married previously and that Klara was his second wife. But the issue can only be settled definitely by the future discovery of some record of another wife, possibly with the name of Margaret.

Certain phrases in the letter to Rothirsch do seem to cast some doubt on the thesis that the work was written out of the author's

personal grief, particularly Tepl's reference to his work as being harvested "out of the field of rhetorical jocundity" ("ex agro rethoricalis iocunditatis").¹¹² The phrase implies a certain light-heartedness of attitude. The playful salutation: "May all things else remain as they are, unless they are changed for the better" ("Reliqua stent, ut stabant, nisi fuerint in uberius reformata") also suggests that nothing is really wrong in the author's life. The reference to the work as one "in which the essentials of rhetoric are expressed" ("in qua rethorice essentialia exprimuntur") and the inclusion of a lengthy description of the techniques used, seems to lend support to those who view it as a rhetorical fiction. It suggests that the theme simply may have been chosen as a worthy vehicle by which to display clever argumentation and rhetorical artistry.

On the other hand, even the assumption of a biographical background for the work does not eliminate the possibility that the author intended the speaker in the final prayer to be the Plowman, as the use of the initial M and the name Margeret in the two parts would seem to suggest.

In addition, the title preceding the prayer in manuscripts H, O and Q states that in chapter xxxiv the klager (or anklager), the name by which the Plowman is referred to throughout the debate, prays for his wife's soul: "In dem hernach geschriben capitel bitt der anklager für sein hausfrauen und wirt sein name erkant bei den roten buchstaben" (manuscript H). Manuscripts A and D refer to him in the title as the ackerman: "Hie bitt der ackerman für seiner frauwen sele der roten buchstaben der grossen nennet als der clager Diss cappitel stett eins bets weyse und ist das XXXIIII capittel" (manuscript A).¹¹³

Weber argues that it was not part of the literary tradition of the debate form that one of the contestants should speak after the judge's decision and, therefore, the prayer should be considered an epilogue of the author; unless one believes that Tepl broke with the tradition (p. 278, note 13). Yet in one of the oldest debates of all, and one with which Tepl would have been familiar, Job responds to God's verdict, and his response is the goal of the work. If it were so unlikely for the Plowman to have spoken the prayer, one wonders why the earliest manuscripts unanimously refer to the klager/anklager or the ackerman as the speaker, and none of them to the author.

However that may be, the prayer remains the high point of the debate. It is in the prayer that the speaker, Plowman or author, actually attempts to resolve the questions raised.

Thematic connections between the prayer and the rest of the work include, in addition to the name Margeret, the heartfelt "Amen," or "so be it," of affirmation which is spoken at the very end of the prayer and which recalls and contrasts with the Plowman's last words in the final round of the debate, his böses Amen which ends chapter xxxi (Krogmann edition). The closing words of the prayer, the appeal to all creatures to join him in affirmation of God's will, recalls the words of the beginning of the debate and forms a striking counter piece to the Plowman's appeal to all creatures, his call to arms in opposing Death, of the first chapter. In the prayer the speaker says: "Alles, das under des ewigen fanentragers fanen gehört, es sei welicherlei creatüre es sei, helft mir aus herzen grunde seliglich mit innigkeit sprechen: Amen!" (73-75). In his opening speech the Plowman cries: [A]lles, das leben und wesen hat, sei euch

unhold, ungünstig und fluchen euch ewiglichen! . . . von mir und aller
menniglich sei über euch ernstlich zeter! geschriren mit gewundenen
henden!" (i,9-11, 15-17).

The prayer itself consists of two parts. The first part is a long catalogue of God's wonderful and incomprehensible qualities, and a hymn to His power in nature. The second part of the prayer, comprising the last thirteen lines, commends the soul of the wife to God's care and ends with a touching acceptance and affirmation of the fact. Much of the first part, the catalogue of God's virtues, resembles similar passages in the book of Job. Both works praise God's might in governing the forces of nature and mention lightning, snow, rain, hail and winds. In the Ackermann God is called:

. . . des meres streum *trenner; der luft unstetigkeit
mischer; des feures hitze kreftiger; aller elemente
tirmer; doners, blitzens, nebels, schaures, snees,
regens, regenbogens, miltaues, windes, reifes und aller
irer mitwirkung einiger essemeister; alles himelischen
heres gewaltiger herzog (49-54).

The book of Job says:

. . . he thunders with his majestic voice
and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice
is heard
. . . (2 lines)
For to the snow he said, 'Fall on the earth;'
and to the shower and the rain, 'Be strong.'
. . . (2 lines)
From its chamber comes the whirlwind,
and cold from the scattering winds.
By the breath of God ice is given,
and the broad waters are frozen fast.
He loads the thick cloud with moisture;
the clouds scatter his lightning.
They turn round and round by his guidance
to accomplish all that he commands them
on the face of the habitable world.
(37:4-12)

The picture of God which is revealed in the prayer transcends the Plowman's former narrow view. It culminates in the assertion that God encompasses all phases of the creative process. He is called creator, upholder, and destroyer: "erquicker, aufhalter und vernichter"-- a sharp change from the Plowman's assertion in chapter xv that God cannot be responsible for his wife's death. The final words in the catalogue of God's virtues describe him as embodying all aspects of creation:

aller weilwesen, aller zeitwesen und immerwesen ganz
mechtiger erquicker, aufhalter und vernichter, des
wesen auch, als du in dir selbs bist, ausrichten,
visieren, entwerfen und abnehmen niemand kan; ganzes
gut über alles gut! (58-62).

The fact that this description is the final one in the long list of God's virtues lends it particular significance. It constitutes the end of the hymn to God. The passage which follows it marks a new phase in the prayer; it no longer describes God, but is devoted to intercession for the soul of the wife and begins with the words: "Allerwirdigister ewiger herre Jhesu! enphahe genediglichen den geist, enphahe gütlichen die sele meiner auserwelten liebsten hausfrauen! Die ewigen rue gib ir, herre!" (63-65).¹¹⁴

Although Death has ignored the questions the Plowman raises in the last round of the debate about Death's arguments, the prayer returns to some of these issues, for example the matter of the annihilation of life from the world. In chapter xxxi the Plowman contradicted Death's prediction that there will be an end both to the world and to all life by citing the authority of "Plato and other philosophers" who say that the universe is built on the principle of eternal renewal. In the prayer that process of eternal renewal is made part of the new image of God.

The speaker recalls Death's repeated boasts that everyone and everything will be transformed "von icht zu nicht" (xx, 14; x, 13-14, 15-16; xvi, 14-15). But in the prayer this action is shown to be God's province. This time the concept is expanded and completed by the addition of the reverse phase. The direction is no longer presented as the one-way cycle that Death pictures, moving inexorably from existence to non-existence, but is complimented by the reverse process and the explanation that God is the one who annihilates, but He also creates from nothing: "aus ichts nichts, aus nichts ichts allein vermögender würker" (xxxiv, 57-58). This line immediately precedes the final naming of God as upholder and destroyer.

The description of God in the closing prayer makes use of many oppositions and antitheses to depict God. He is called "altgreiser jüngeling" (xxxiv, 7), "anfang und ende" (14), "licht, das . . . verfinstert" (9), "ewiger freuden spender, irdischer wünnen störer" (33). In His all-encompassing nature he is "wirt, ingesinde und hausgenosse" (34), "Kroner und die kron, loner und der lon" (4), "erquicker, aufhalter und vernichter" (59-60). He is the ruler of heaven but also the creator of hell, "der helle stiffter" (49). He guides his creatures into life and into death: "aus der muter leib in der erden gruft selbmögender geleiter" (25-26).

God is shown to be both the kindly benefactor and avenger which the Plowman saw in him: "widerbringer aller gebrechen" (xxxiv, 19-20) and also ultimately responsible for the death of his wife: "ursacher aller sachen" (21-22). Both contestants are partly right and partly wrong about God. Both hold incomplete views.

Thus the image of God has changed radically from that earlier view which only saw Him as comforter and avenger and which rejected His association with death. The final view of God is a concept not unlike that with which Job has wrestled from the beginning--the Old Testament God who is both creator and destroyer: "The Lord kills and brings to life" (I. Sam. 2:6), "In his hand is the life of every living thing / and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). He is a God who "wounds, but he binds up; / he smites, but his hands heal" (Job 5:18).

It has frequently been pointed out that some of the phrases in the final prayer seem to have been taken directly from Neumarkt's Buch der Liebkosungen, a work which also grapples with the problem of evil. The fact that Tepl chose these particular ideas with which to end his hymn of praise indicates their significance for the work.

Hrubý suggests that Tepl made use of an as yet undiscovered precursor in composing his Ackermann. Hrubý's thesis is that the prototype was strongly Aristotelian in its bias and that Tepl attempted to bring the ideas in this prototype, particularly the doctrine of eternal renewal, into line with more orthodox Christian doctrines.¹¹⁵ Actually, however, the idea of eternal renewal was not entirely incompatible with orthodox Catholic theology. Thomas Aquinas, who subscribed to the New Testament doctrine that there would be an end to the world, also looked forward to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. Aquinas argued that, although God has the power to annihilate as well as to create, his power and goodness are primarily manifested by the conservation of things, and, therefore, he denied that anything at all would be annihilated.¹¹⁶

The problem of how the existence of evil is to be reconciled with

God's good nature is a difficult one for any monotheistic system to explain. Both the book of Job and the Ackermann deal with the question how a just God can permit evil, but Job and the Plowman approach the problem from opposite sides. Job knows from the first that both good and evil come from God, but questions God's justice. The Plowman, on the other hand, trusts God's justice, but cannot comprehend that God should allow evil. Both come to affirm the total picture of God's nature including both aspects, though aware that they are unable to fully understand it. God's vindication of Job affirms paradoxically that He is just though not to be comprehended by man. The Plowman, who trusted in God's justice all along, learns that God approves Death and is more complex and unfathomable than he had imagined.

For the Plowman the answers to the insoluble questions can be and are postponed to the hereafter where rewards and punishments will correct all injustices of this life and all questions will be answered. The dilemma does not have to be solved in this life as it must for a world view which does not include the hope of immortality. This is the fundamental difference between the Plowman's situation and that of Job. Modern thinkers point out that the idea of rewards and punishments in an afterlife still does not explain the existence of evil or resolve the paradox how to harmonize God's goodness and omnipotence with the existence of evil, a problem which was not really dealt with throughout the Middle Ages.

It has been pointed out that the medieval mind considered God to be the essence of all courtly virtues and found it difficult to reconcile unpleasant traits with this image. Medieval thinkers could not grasp the relationship between God and an evil and unruly servant

like Death. Yet the idea that there should be a lack of harmony in the world was simply beyond their comprehension. The Plowman's view of the relationship between God and Death is a caricature of this attitude. By the end of the work this view has been transcended. It is no longer beyond his understanding that God should encompass both functions.

Templ's treatment of the problem of evil is more modern than views which preceded it and some which followed it in confronting evil as a real problem and trying to reconcile it, in the same way that Job does, with God's nature. Even a later thinker such as Nicholas of Cusa, though achieving a view of God which is in some ways similar to that of Templ, failed to come to grips with the problem of evil as Templ does. Templ's solution, which views God as mysteriously encompassing contradictions, appears to resemble Cusa's definition of God as the coincidence of opposites.¹¹⁷ Although the two ideas seem similar, they actually represent very different ways of looking at the world. Cusa's definition of God does not arise out of perplexity over problems which he perceives in the functioning of the world order. He regards the world essentially as a beautiful harmony.

Cusa, who lived approximately forty years after Templ, is regarded as a transitional figure whose philosophy contains elements of both medieval and modern thought. Yet the aspects of his philosophy which have the most in common with modern thought are not his attitudes on metaphysical issues or his theory of the coincidence of opposites. What is new in his thought is his attempt at a scientific approach, the application of mathematical concepts to the explanation of metaphysical problems. He regards the cosmos as a system that can be studied by means of mathematical principles and uses geometry to attempt to

explain the nature of God and the relationship between God and creation.

The difference between Cusa's doctrine of learned or educated ignorance, his docta ignorantia, and the attitude expressed in the Ackermann is that the acceptance of the paradox in Tepl's final prayer indicates a recognition of the insolubility of the problem and the end of speculation. For Cusa, however, the docta ignorantia is an adopted, systematic method of metaphysical investigation. It is the starting point, rather than the end point, of speculation.

In spite of his new approach, however, Cusa did not advance the conception of the problem of evil. His treatment of the matter is the same as that which persisted throughout the Middle Ages when evil was defined merely as a lack of good or a defective good, having no real existence of its own. He writes: "Futility, defectiveness, error, vice, sickness, death, corruption, and other such things lack all the quality of being."¹¹⁸ "Evil and potential sin and death and becoming-other are not God's creations."¹¹⁹ Like his predecessors, Cusa was firmly convinced of the harmony of the universe. He viewed the world as an emanation of God who is in all things and is all things. The world is both nothing apart from God and at the same time it is a mirror of God. Thus the world is as perfect as it could be, a beautiful reflection of the creator and therefore essentially harmonious. He does not really consider the problem of evil. Tepl attempts to deal with the apparent lack of accord in the world order caused by death and suffering. He acknowledges certain injustices which seem to contradict this essential accord.

The traditional attitude toward suffering--epitomized throughout the Middle Ages by the pious, patient figure of Job-- was that of a trial or process of purification which was to be accepted without question and patiently endured for one's edification. This attitude toward proper behavior in suffering has been replaced in Tepl's Ackermann by a sufferer who questions. While Hartmann's Armer Heinrich deals with the problem of suffering in the medieval categories of tugent, triuwe, ere, etc., viewing it as a discipline, never doubting the harmony of the world order, Tepl's Ackermann presents a case of apparent injustice, the early death of a virtuous woman, and seriously questions that harmony.

While Hartmann's Armer Heinrich represents the traditional, medieval attitude toward the Job theme, Tepl's treatment, though strikingly similar to the book of Job in structure and content, diverges sharply from the prevailing view of Job whose struggle it resembles in confronting and questioning traditional assumptions about God's nature, the relationship between God and death, and the justice of the world order. The audacious attack on the formidable figure of Death represents a similar departure from attitudes which predominated in other medieval treatments of the subject.

Footnotes

¹Many theories have been put forth to explain Job's much quoted statement "For I know that my redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; / and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God" (19:25-26). The fact that the text is obscure and badly preserved makes it difficult to be certain how it should be translated. As evidence of belief in immortality, it is not consistent with Job's other statements about death: ". . . so man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake, or be roused out of his sleep. . . . If a man die, shall he live again?" (14:12,14). Conservative Christian scholars explain it as a prefiguring of Christ's resurrection and evidence for the doctrine that all will be resurrected at the last judgment.

²H. MacLean, "The Job Drama in Modern Germany," in Journal of the Australian Universities' Modern Language Association, 2 (1954), 13.

³Albion Roy King, The Problem of Evil: Christian Concepts and the Book of Job (New York: Ronald Press, 1952), p. 64.

⁴King, p. 55.

⁵Saint Augustine, The City of God, Bk. XI, chs. 9 + 22; Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 149; William S. Sahakian, History of Philosophy (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), p. 110.

⁶Hester L. Williams, "The Personification of Death in Medieval German Literature (1150-1300): A Misrepresentation of Christian Doctrine," Diss. University of Kansas 1974, p. 84.

⁷Walther Rehm, Der Todesgedanke in der deutschen Dichtung vom Mittelalter bis zur Romantik, 2. Aufl. (1928; rpt. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), passim.

⁸Die Gedichte Walthers von der Vogelweide, Hrsg. Carl v. Kraus, 12. Aufl. (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1959), 77, vv. 32-35; Heinrichs von Meissen des Frauenlobs Leiche, Sprüche, Streitgedichte und Lieder, Hrsg. L. Ettmüller (Leipzig: Basse, 1843), Nr. 281, p. 160f.; see Rehm, pp. 50, 56.

⁹Hartmann von Aue, Erec der Wunderaere, Hrsg. Fedor Bech, 3. Aufl., Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters, 4, Nr. 1 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1893).

¹⁰J. Kleinstück, "Zur Auffassung des Todes im Mittelalter," Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, 28 (1954), 40-60.

¹¹Christian von Troyes, Cliges, Hrsg. Wendelin Foerster, Romanische Bibliothek, 1 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1888); cf. Kleinstück, p. 46.

¹²Oeuvres Complètes de Eustache Deschamps, ed. le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 19, 53, (11 vols.) II, VII (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1880, 1891), ballades No. 223, 1357; see Kleinstück, p. 43. Although Kleinstück lists the first excerpt as coming from ballade Nr. 223, I have been unable to locate it under this number.

¹³Mark Musa, Dante's Vita Nuova: A Translation and an Essay (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 12-13.

¹⁴Ortnit und Die Wolfdietriche, Hrsg. Arthur Amelung und Oskar Jänike, Deutsches Heldenbuch, 5 Bde., III-IV (Berlin: Weidmann, 1871-73); see H. Williams, p. 35.

¹⁵Mai und Beafloer, Hrsg. Wilhelm Vollmer, Dichtungen des deutschen Mittelalters, 7 (Leipzig: Göschen, 1848).

¹⁶Wirnt von Gravenberc, Wigalois der Ritter mit dem Rade, Hrsg. J.M.N. Kapteyn, Reinische Beiträge, 7 (Bonn: Klopp, 1926).

¹⁷Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi, Hrsg. Clemens Blume und Guido Dreves, Pia Dictamina Reimgebete und Leselieder des Mittelalters, 6. Folge, XXXIII (Leipzig, 1899; rpt. New York and London: Johnson Reprint Co., 1961), p. 288.

¹⁸"Briefwechsel zwischen Leben und Tod," in Konrad Burdach, Der Dichter des Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit, 2. Hälfte, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, III, 2,3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1932), pp. 518-19.

¹⁹Kleinstück, p. 52.

²⁰"Legende von der Todes-Vision des Magister Polycarp," in Konrad Burdach, Der Dichter des Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit, 2. Hälfte, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, III, 2,3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1932), pp. 520-22.

²¹Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan und Isolt (Fortsetzung und Schluss durch Ulrich von Türheim), Hrsg. H. F. Massmann (Leipzig: Göschen, 1843).

²²Velma E. Richmond, Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966).

²³Edelgard Dubruck, The Theme of Death in French Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), p. 34.

²⁴Kurt F. Reinhardt, Germany: 2000 Years, rev. ed., (New York: Ungar, 1961), I, 175.

²⁵Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, trans. F. Hopman (London: Arnold, 1924), p. 124.

²⁶Bruno Boesch, "Die Literatur des Spätmittelalters," in Deutsche Literaturgeschichte in Grundzügen, Hrsg. Bruno Boesch, 3. Aufl. (Bern/München: Franke, 1967), p. 90.

²⁷ Anton Benedict, Das Leben des heiligen Hieronymus in der Übersetzung des Bischofs Johannes VII. von Olmütz (Prag: Verin für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen, 1880), pp. 62-65, quoted in Rehm, p. 97.

²⁸ Mary Christopher Pecheux, Aspects of the Treatment of Death in Middle English Poetry, Diss. Catholic Univ. of America (Washington D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1951), pp. 78, 82-83, 85, 144.

²⁹ Hellmut Rosenfeld, Der Mittelalterliche Totentanz: Entstehung--Entwicklung--Bedeutung (Münster: Böhlaus, 1954), pp. 284, 289-90; Peter von Moos, Consolatio (München: Fink, 1971/72), III, 107.

³⁰ Walter Blank, "Aspekte der 'Ackermann'-Interpretation," Der Deutschunterricht, 17, No. 2 (1965), 67; Arthur Hübner, "Deutsches Mittelalter und italienische Renaissance im 'Ackermann aus Böhmen'," Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde, 51 (1937), 225-39; rpt. s.v. Schwarz, p. 371.

³¹ H. G. Wells, The Undying Fire (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), p. 48.

³² Johannes von Saaz, Der Ackermann aus Böhmen, Hrsg. Günther Jungbluth, Bd. I (Heidelberg: Winter, 1969). Further quotations will refer to this edition.

³³ Gisela Uellenberg, "Hiob-Buch," Kindlers Literatur-Lexikon, 1964 ed.

³⁴ Samuel Terrien, Job: Poet of Existence (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), p. 27.

³⁵ Marvin H. Pope, Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes, The Anchor Bible, XV (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), p. xxxvii.

³⁶ Willy Krogmann, introd. & ed., Johannes von Tepl, der ackerman, Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters, N.F., 1 (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1954), p.12.

³⁷ Keith Spalding, introd. & ed., Johann von Tepl: Der Ackermann aus Böhmen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), p. xxv; Hübner, p. 371.

³⁸ Konrad Joseph Heilig, "Die lateinische Widmung des Ackermanns aus Böhmen," Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung, 47 (1933), 414-426; rpt. in Der Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit, ed. Ernst Schwarz, Wege der Forschung, 143 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 139, note c; M. O'C. Walshe, "'Der Ackermann aus Böhmen' and Its Latin Dedication," Modern Language Review 47 (1952), 211.

³⁹ Anton Blashka, "Der Topos scribendo solari--Briefschreiben als Trost," Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Halle, 5 (1956), pp. 637-38.

⁴⁰ Arthur Hübner, Das Deutsche im Ackermann aus Böhmen, Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 18 (Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1935), 323-98; rpt. in Der Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit, ed. Ernst Schwarz, Wege der Forschung, 143 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 239.

⁴¹ Franz Bäuml, Rhetorical Devices and Structure in the "Ackermann aus Böhmen", University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 60 (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1960), p. 5.

⁴² Günther Jungbluth, "Probleme der 'Ackermann'-Dichtung," Wirkendes Wort, 18 (1967), p. 146; Gerhard Hahn, Die Einheit des "Ackermann aus Böhmen", Münchner Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 5 (München: Beck, 1963), p. 114.

⁴³ Gerhard Hahn, Johannes von Saaz, Der Ackermann aus Böhmen: Interpretationen zum Deutschunterricht an den höheren Schulen (München: Oldenbourg, 1963), p. 30.

- ⁴⁴ Andersen, p. 238.
- ⁴⁵ Andersen, p. 238.
- ⁴⁶ Rolf Eckhart, "Der Ackermann aus Böhmen," Kindlers Literatur-Lexikon, 1964 ed.
- ⁴⁷ Jungbluth, Der Ackermann, p. 88.
- ⁴⁸ See Kleinstück, pp. 55-58.
- ⁴⁹ Rosenfeld, pp. 284, 289.
- ⁵⁰ Leonard P. Kurtz, The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature, Publications of the Institute of French Studies, Inc., Columbia Univ. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1934), p. 193.
- ⁵¹ Jungbluth, Der Ackermann, p. 77.
- ⁵² Ella Schafferus, "Der Ackermann aus Böhmen und die Weltanschauung des Mittelalters," Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum, 72 (1935), p. 233; Bäuml, p. 64.
- ⁵³ Wells, p. 12.
- ⁵⁴ Konrad Burdach, Platonische, freireligiöse und persönliche Züge im "Ackermann aus Böhmen," Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 14 (1933), 610-74; rpt. s. v. Schwarz., p. 162.
- ⁵⁵ Walther Rehm, "Zur Gestaltung des Todesgedankens bei Petrarca und Johann von Saaz," Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, 5 (1927), p. 442.
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- ⁵⁸ Friedrich Ranke, "Zum Formwillen und Lebensgefühl in der deutschen Dichtung des späten Mittelalters," DVLG, 18 (1940), 325; Günther Müller, "Gradualismus," DVLG, 2 (1924), 707.
- ⁵⁹ Blank, p. 79.
- ⁶⁰ Gerhard Hahn, Die Einheit des "Ackermann aus Böhmen", Münchner Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 5 (München: Beck, 1963), p. 90.
- ⁶¹ Hugo Kuhn, "Zwei mittelalterliche Dichtungen vom Tod: 'Memento mori' und 'Der Ackermann von Böhmen'," Der Deutschunterricht, 5, No. 6 (1953), 93.
- ⁶² Spalding, introd., Johann von Tepl, p. xxxiii.
- ⁶³ Schafferus, p. 223.
- ⁶⁴ Arthur Hübner, "Deutsches Mittelalter," Schwarz, p. 384.
- ⁶⁵ Renée Brand, Zur Interpretation des "Ackermann aus Böhmen", Baseler Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1944), p. 21.
- ⁶⁶ Bäuml, Rhetorical Devices, p. 113.
- ⁶⁷ Burdach, "Platonische, freireligiöse, persönliche Züge," p. 186; Hans Rupprich, Die deutsche Literatur vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Barock, vol. IV/1 of Geschichte der deutschen Literatur, Hrsg. Helmut de Boor (München: Beck, 1970), p. 398; Deinert, p. 215; Spalding, p. 75; Schafferus, pp. 216, 219.

⁶⁸ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 36; Joachim Weber, "Kapitelaufbau und tektonischer Stil im Ackermann aus Böhmen," Diss. Göttingen 1949, p. 278, note 13; Krogmann, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Hahn, Die Einheit, p. 91

⁷⁰ Heilig, p. 138.

⁷¹ Anton Blaschka, "Ackermann-Epilog," Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen, 73 (1935), 73-87; rpt. s.v. Schwarz, p. 350.

⁷² Johannes von Tepl, Der Ackermann aus Böhmen, ed. & introd. M. O'C. Walshe, Duckworth's German Texts, 8 (London: Duckworth, 1951), p. xii.

⁷³ Karl Ernst Georges, Ausführliches Lateinisch-Deutsches Handwörterbuch, 1897 ed.

⁷⁴ Hans Walther, Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, Bd. 5, Heft 2 (München: Beck, 1920), pp. 186-87; Ranke states that debates were increasingly left undecided in late medieval times, p. 316.

⁷⁵ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Bäuml, Rhetorical Devices, p. 113.

⁷⁷ Heilig, "Die lateinische Widmung," p. 137.

⁷⁸ Heilig, p. 139. Because of differences of opinion about the translation of some passages in the letter, unless otherwise indicated I am using Heilig's interpretation, which is commonly referred to and reliable.

⁷⁹ Heilig, p. 140-41.

⁸⁰ Blaschka, "Ackermann-Epilog," p. 350.

⁸¹ Heilig, p. 141.

- ⁸² Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 26.
- ⁸³ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 25.
- ⁸⁴ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 26.
- ⁸⁵ Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein, Hrsg. Karl K. Klein, Alt-deutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962), p. 25.
- ⁸⁶ Des Minnesangs Frühling, Hrsg. Carl v. Kraus, 35. Aufl. (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1970), p. 75.
- ⁸⁷ Bäumel, Rhetorical Devices, p. 118.
- ⁸⁸ M. O'C Walshe, "Der Ackermann aus Böhmen: A Structural Interpretation," Classica et Mediaevalia, 15 (1954), p. 134.
- ⁸⁹ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 30.
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- ⁹¹ M. O'C Walshe, introd., Der Ackermann aus Böhmen (London: Duckworth, 1951), p. xv.
- ⁹² Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 32.
- ⁹³ Bäumel, Rhetorical Devices, p. 71.
- ⁹⁴ Walshe, Introd., Der Ackermann, p. xv; Spalding, Johann von Tepl, p. 55.
- ⁹⁵ Alois Bernt and Konrad Burdach, Der Ackermann aus Böhmen, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, III, 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1917), p. 284.
- ⁹⁶ Krogmann, Johannes von Tepl, der ackerman, p. 197.
- ⁹⁷ Felix Genzmer, Anmerkungen, Johannes von Tepl: Der Ackermann aus Böhmen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1967), p. 89.

- ⁹⁸ Huizinga, The Waning, p. 126.
- ⁹⁹ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 32.
- ¹⁰⁰ Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 32.
- ¹⁰¹ Bäuml, Rhetorical Devices, p. 94.
- ¹⁰² Brand, Zur Interpretation, p. 36.
- ¹⁰³ Willy Krogmann, "Neue Funde der Ackermannforschung," DVJG, 37 (1963), 254f.
- ¹⁰⁴ Although death in the Tractatus is feminine, I will use the masculine pronoun in referring to it in English.
- ¹⁰⁵ Krogmann's explanatory notes will be given in parenthesis.
- ¹⁰⁶ Burdach, "Platonische, freireligiöse, persönliche Züge," pp. 189-90.
- ¹⁰⁷ Blaschka, "Ackermann-Epilog," p. 351f.
- ¹⁰⁸ Robert Frost, A Masque of Reason (New York: Holt, 1945), p. 5.
- ¹⁰⁹ Levenson, p. 29.
- ¹¹⁰ G. K. Chesterton, "Man is Most Comforted by Paradoxes," Introduction to The Book of Job (London: Palmer and Hayward, 1916), pp. ix-xxvii, abridged; rpt. in The Dimensions of Job, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 234.
- ¹¹¹ Karl Beer, Neue Forschungen über den Schöpfer des Dialogs „Der Ackermann aus Böhmen“, Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen, 3 (1930-33), 1-56; rpt. in Der Ackermann aus Böhmen des Johannes von Tepl und seine Zeit, ed. Ernst Schwarz, Wege der Forschung, 143 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 114.

¹¹²Walshe, introd. Ackermann aus Böhmen, p. xi; Heilig, "Die Lateinische Widmung," pp. 137-39.

¹¹³Jungbluth edition, p. 133.

¹¹⁴This interpretation is based on the 1969 Jungbluth edition of the text.

¹¹⁵Hrubý, p. 193.

¹¹⁶The Great Ideas: A Synopticon of Great Books of the Western World, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Benton, 1952), II, p. 1129.

¹¹⁷Nikolaus von Kues, Die belehrte Unwissenheit, trans. Paul Wilpert, *Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues*, Bde. XVa, XVb (Hamburg: Meiner, 1964, 1967).

¹¹⁸Karl Jaspers, The Great Philosophers, trans. Ralph Manheim, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1957), p. 263.

¹¹⁹Jaspers, p. 263.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

The resurgence of interest in the book of Job in the twentieth century and the proliferation of works on the Job theme testify to the timelessness and universality of the theme. Some critics maintain that it is reading too much into the Old Testament book to interpret it in twentieth century existential terms. The question of the meaninglessness or absurdity of man's existence was not an issue in ancient Hebrew times when all world views were strictly theocentric. Yet the question of God's nature--whether He is to be trusted or not--was no less threatening and urgent to Job than is the modern dilemma of man in an absurd universe. The problem whether there is a purpose to man's existence, any values which can be trusted in absolutely, any explanation to the seemingly aimless pain and suffering in life, raises the same question at all times: What is God's nature? Why does He allow the world to operate as it does?

These questions are asked more frequently and more insistently during times of great calamities, as in the wake of the two world wars of this century. The unmatched destructiveness and unprecedented atrocities of the two wars shattered prewar optimism in man's ability to solve his own problems and to create a better world through scientific and sociological advances. Modern works on the Job theme reflect this crisis of confidence. They share a renewed concern with the issue of the ultimate origin and nature of evil. Like the disasters

of this century which produced a reevaluation of traditional assumptions, the terrible plagues of the fourteenth century--the first pandemic in 800 years--must have severely shaken the confidence in the essential harmony of the universe which was the heritage of the high Middle Ages, resulting in questionings of accepted doctrines and producing works such as Neumarkt's Buch der Liebkosungen and Hugo von Montfort's poems, written at the death of his second wife, which deal with the problem of evil.

The fact that we know so little about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has made interpretation of the Ackermann difficult and led to many controversies which have yet to be resolved. This study, in examining Tepl's work in connection with the late medieval view of Job, attitudes toward suffering, death, and the problem of evil, has attempted to clarify how the late medieval mind dealt with these questions and to establish where Tepl's work stands in relation to views which preceded and followed it. It suggests that Tepl, along with other figures, was beginning to seriously confront the problems of evil and God's nature, and that Tepl's Ackermann, in posing the questions it does, and in recognizing the contradictoriness of the answers it accepts, goes beyond previous treatments of these problems.

While earlier works in the tradition of medieval laments over death reveal hatred and cursing of death but no real questioning of the justification of Death's existence, Tepl's *Plowman* shows a new boldness in his unintimidated confrontation of the formidable figure of Death. Although the author personifies the concept in nominally traditional fashion, he also treats death as an abstraction, characteristic of the growing tendency in the late Middle Ages to see

the figure as a symbol of mortality rather than as the terrifying apparition of earlier times.

Although widely separated in time, Tepl's Ackermann and the Old Testament book of Job portray the same archetypal experience of sudden insight and resulting questioning which is initiated by an ordeal of personal suffering. Since both protagonists are in their middle years, a case might be made to identify the experience as a kind of mid-life crisis resembling the typological experience of the thirty-year-old hero, which is a familiar theme in world literature. Theodore Ziolkowsky describes the crisis of the thirty-year-old as typically beginning with an "abrupt awakening" which is followed by "a timeless state of reflection and analysis of existence." It ends with "a conscious decision that determines his [the hero's] future attitude toward the world."¹ Similar crises can be identified as occurring at critical junctures later in life, sometimes brought on by the death of a loved one. They constitute part of the process of coming to terms with such problems as the fact of mortality and the meaning of suffering.

Both works are considered by some critics to be authentic expressions of personal conflict. This has not been firmly established in either case. A closely related question is whether the final prayer is to be considered as spoken by the Plowman or as an epilogue of the author. This study has shown that it is most reasonable to see the Plowman as the speaker. Thus, the structural comparison with the book of Job becomes very significant. Both works conclude with a final prayer that reflects the attempt to resolve the questions raised.

The most important aspect of the comparison of the two works is the treatment of the central theme, that of the justice or lack of

justice in the world order and the related problem of the connection between the evil in the world and God's omnipotent, all-good nature--the problem of theodicy. The theme of justice is reflected in the quasi-judicial settings of the works and use of legal terminology. The theme is sustained in the Ackermann through the use of variations on the terms recht and gerechtigkeit.

Job is the classic treatment of the problem of theodicy, the ancient paradox which was also pondered by such early thinkers as Epicurus and Lucretius. The dilemma is that of reconciling the existence of evil with the concept of a God who is by definition both all-good and all-powerful. The two assertions involve a logical contradiction. Either God wishes to prevent evil but is unable to do so, in which case he cannot be omnipotent, or he could prevent evil but does not wish to, in which case he cannot be all good. If he is both omnipotent and good, where does evil come from? Medieval metaphysicians dealt with the problem by denying a real existence to evil, defining it instead as a deficient good or lack of good and viewing the world as essentially harmonious. Tepl examines the apparent lack of harmony in the world order caused by death and struggles in Jobean fashion with the problem of reconciling this real evil with the doctrines of God's omnipotence and goodness.

The medieval practice of personifying death and treating it as in some way independent of God allowed writers largely to ignore or sidestep the question of God's responsibility in creating and tolerating such an evil. In partially overcoming the tendency to view death as an independent, evil, and malicious being operating contrary to God's purposes, (the picture of death presented in the Totentanz literature and the folk

tradition) Tepl faces new difficulties. The opposing Christian attitude which represents death as the servant of God, must reconcile the brutality and maliciousness of the Totentanz figure with God's control of this function and ultimately raises the question of God's nature.

The problem of the explanation of the functioning of Death's random selection, the lack of congruence between the natural order and the moral order, is another issue with which the Plowman attempts to come to terms. The Plowman rails against the justice of Death's existence as an institution but actually brings arguments which only criticize the way Death carries out his function, not the function itself. His feeling that there is something unjust about death's impartiality echos the laments in the Totentanz literature which criticize death for not sparing children and for taking the wrong people at the wrong time. God's verdict in the Ackermann endorses Death's random selection in the natural order, but in doing so further implicates God in willing the death of the Plowman's wife. The point at which God's control and Death's freedom intersect is shrouded in mystery.

The degree to which Tepl is seen to be questioning traditional assumptions about death and God depends on one's interpretation of Tepl's plan for the structure of his work. Opinions differ on the manner in which the debate is decided. This study has attempted to establish that Death does not convince the Plowman of the rightness of his arguments in the course of the debate, but that the author intended the encounter to end in a draw. This conclusion is supported by an examination of the arguments Tepl uses to support Death's position which indicate that the author depicted Death more negatively than necessary and that he did not

intend for Death to convince the Plowman. The Plowman is portrayed as confused on the issues of God's nature and Death's impartiality. But the erroneous ideas he holds are replaced after the verdict by a more complete view. The author purposely depicted the Plowman as naive and confused and Death as a belligerent opponent (not God's advocate) in order to produce a lively debate and to show that both attitudes are wrong. The book of Job employs a similar technique in showing the attempts of Job and his opponents to define God by means of their own limited parameters to be futile and presumptuous.

Another question which is affected by the interpretation of the structure of the debate is the question of Tepl's attitude toward the resolution of the issues raised. This relates to the placement of the work in the history of ideas. Critics who maintain that the work represents and is consistent with earlier ideas about death, God's nature, and the world order argue that the author does not view the outcome as problematical. Others, however, see in it evidence of the weakness of late medieval religious doctrines and the outcome of the debate as expressing an attitude bordering on despair in the face of the incomprehensible. My interpretation of the structure of the work leads to the conclusion that Tepl was aware of the problematical nature of the issues raised but that, instead of giving up in the face of the incomprehensible, he attempts a synthesis which resembles the Jobean acceptance and affirmation of the contradictory aspects of God's nature and the world order, and which goes beyond the popular medieval view he parodies in the Plowman's naive, one-sided concept of God.

Like the debate in the book of Job, the Ackermann ends in an

impasse until God passes judgment. This interpretation emphasizes the role of the final prayer as an integral part of the process of the Plowman's enlightenment. The prayer attempts to come to terms with the questions raised in the debate and provides the fulfillment of the Plowman's effort to reach an understanding of his plight, which clearly has not been achieved in the confused and doubting last words of the Plowman in chapter xxxi. The final prayer transcends the Plowman's earlier concept of the relationship between death and God, replacing it with the view that God is not merely the chivalrous benefactor and avenger of wrongs as he pictured Him, but controls and approves both life and the death. The Plowman learns to accept God's ultimate responsibility for his wife's death. The new view acknowledges and accepts the contradictions in God's nature.

Like Job, the Plowman defends the integrity of life. In affirming such values as love, the joy of a happy marriage and family life, he shows that life to him is not all vanity as it is pictured to be in Totentanz literature. It is in his final act of acceptance and affirmation despite his human feelings of love and sense of loss, that the Ackermann ranks with Job as one of the most beautiful and moving treatments of man's attempt to confront the question of God's ultimate sovereignty.

The question to what extent the Job story may have influenced Tepl cannot be answered with certainty. It can be stated, however, that the two works strikingly resemble each other in structure and content. While Hartmann's Armer Heinrich represents the traditional, medieval attitude toward the Job story--the ideal of a patient Job, exemplifying passive

endurance of suffering--Tepl's work diverges sharply from the prevailing interpretation of Job and more closely resembles the modern view of the Job story as a real questioning of traditionally popular beliefs about God's nature and the justice of the world order.

Footnote

¹Theodore Ziolkowski, Dimensions of the Modern Novel (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press), pp. 274, 278.

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